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EDITORIAL

Belarus' Colonial Legacy

Last several years have witnessed a noticeable decline of interest in Belarus by Western media and politicians. This is understandable in the era of Arab Spring revolutions. The December 2010 Lukašenka regime's crackdown on opposition was the last turbulent event, recorded in Belarus.

What worries me more is the Western medias' continuing tendency to regard Belarus as a post-Soviet "Russophone" country, with no language and culture of its own. This impression is intensified by the fact that the present Belarus' president (A. Lukašenka) and the country's leadership **prefer to use Russian** in communicating with the country's people. Their choice seems to be politically motivated, since for most of them Belarusian is not a foreign language.

Western media's treatment of Belarus resembles that of African countries - former colonies of European empires. Here too, the official language of these countries' leadership is that of former colonial overlords - often, since it served as language of communication in many artificially carved-up states.

For the Belarusian people, the Russian language is the **language of its former colonizers** - the Russian tsarist, and later Soviet empires. By being content with regarding Belarus as a "Russophone" country, without recognizing its distinct language and culture, Western media and politicians are denigrating our country, and are unwittingly pushing it into Russia's orbit.

We recognize the unpleasant fact that currently the majority of Belarus' citizens mostly speaks Russian - while being familiar with its native Belarusian.

However, quite recently, the situation was different. In 1920s, the just established Belarusian Soviet Republic (BSSR) was ruled by local Belarusian Communists, who promoted the use of Belarusian in public life.

The following decade, 1930s, brought Stalinist repressions, resulting in executions of over 200,000 Belarusian cultural workers, and deporting to Soviet gulags half a million of more prosperous and enterprising farmers. This blow virtually **annihilated the nation's elites** - whose absence was keenly felt during following decades of systematic russification.

After 1945, the country was controlled by the predominantly Russian Partisan leadership - parachuted into deep forests in World War II behind German lines. Under their leadership, the process of russification was intensified. By 1980, there was not a single Belarusian-language school in the capital, and all higher education was conducted in Russian.

At this point one should emphasize the role of the Soviet education system, that has been functioning as a **powerful russification tool** for generations.

The system functioned in the following manner:

In all schools (from elementary schools to universities) in all Soviet republics, the primary language of instruction was Russian. It was mandatory, while education in native languages of non-Russian republics was reduced to an **option**. In order to have their children educated in their native language — or even to study it as a subject — parents had to **ask** for it.

BUT - since education in most universities was (and still is) only in Russian, most parents concluded that knowledge of an optional language would put their children at disadvantage in pursuing further studies. In other words, it would be useless. The wish to spare their children the often traumatic transition from one language to another one also played an important role.

After the 1995 referendum (considered illegal by many), after Russian resumed its official status, the above-described discriminatory system was restored to full extent — and resulted in a drastic decrease in the number of Belarusian-language schools and even individual classes. Today they are still being liquidated.

Today's reality is such that for most young people, graduates of the russificatory school system, it is easier and more comfortable to express themselves in Russian — being only familiar with Belarusian.

In general, with the present legalized bilingualism (by the 1995 referendum), when both Belarusian and Russian are official, the country's authorities do not bother with creating conditions for a real equality of these languages. Russian is being promoted over Belarusian in practically all spheres of public life.

As a matter of fact, in Belarus Belarusian should be the only official language. In this country everybody should be able to speak Belarusian, just as English is spoken in England, Polish in Poland, etc. This is the logic of life in any national state. Since Russians are not native inhabitants of Belarus, Russian does not have any reason to be privileged, and officially promoted - at the expense of Belarusian.

Actually, Belarus cannot support a real bilingualism, since this feature usually serves as a transitional stage to the general use of one (more developed)language. The current regime had really no right to put the issue of national language to a referendum.

Today, the strict official application of the Soviet-style education system (described above), has led to some tragic results. For instance, in the city of Mahilioŭ, with population of 350,000, just one child is attending a Belarusian-language class - not even a full-fledged Belarusian school.

Fortunately the younger generation is attempting to correct the situation, at least on the local level. For, instance, in a northern Belarusian city, a tenth-grader organized a Belarusian-language week in his school; students spoke only Belarusian, and all subjects were taught in the native language. The school director - most likely a sympathizer herself - permitted this event to take place.

George Stankevich

Concept of the issue

This year our journal celebrates its 25th anniversary. We would like to thank our editors-in-chief, Joe Arciuch and George Stankevich. We are also grateful to our editorial team, all our contributors, supporters and our most valuable readership.

The current issue contains greetings to our anniversary from our colleagues, friends and partners from the BNR Rada, the North American Association for Belarusian Studies, the Belarusian Institute of Arts and Sciences and the Center for Belarusian Studies.

In this issue **George Stankevich** in his text *Belarus' colonial legacy* and **Hanna Vasilevich** in her article *Belarus' abnormal bilingualism* address the issue of use and facilities of the Belarusian language in Belarus.

Professor **Zachar Šybieka** in his featured text *Understanding Kalinoŭski* raises the issue of the role of Kastuś Kalinoŭski in the Belarusian intellectual discourse.

Kiryl Kascian in another featured text entitled *Grigory Ioffe's misunderstood Belarus* discusses whether Ioffe's analysis of the Belarus-related events would be able to contribute to understanding Belarus in the West.

In his interview **Uladzimir Baradač**, chairman of the Organizing Committee of the "Council for National Revival," expresses his own view on the present situation in Belarus.

Jan Maksymiuk in his text *No easy way forward: a personal note on Poland's Belarusian minority* provides his viewpoint on the current situation of the Belarusian minority in Poland.

The text *Minsk-Tbilisi: Reciprocal Diplomatic Assistance* by **David Erkomaishvili** addresses the current stage of Belarusian-Georgian relations within the context of the EU Eastern Partnership initiative and the political situation in the CEE region.

Ilya Kunitski in his text *From political struggle to civil work: Belarusian democratic movement at the moment* deals with the current situation of the youth democratic movement in Belarus.

In her text *A little story about my life or why I write about Belarus* **Ángela Espinosa Ruiz,** one of the winners of the Belarus in Focus 2012 journalist contest, shares personal experience on why foreigners start writing on Belarus-related issues.

Our journal is undergoing changes which would enable it to expand its niche in the very dynamic world of the information age. We are looking forward to receive contributions from new authors, particularly from young scholars and analysts who deal with Belarus-related issues. We would also be very grateful for your feedbacks and comments on any Belarus-related topic. For any information, please, contact us at

thepointjournal@gmail.com.

NAABS Greetings To BELARUSIAN REVIEW

The North American Association for Belarusian Studies would like to congratulate Belarusian Review on its 25th anniversary. BR has served as a model of a popular journal that provides careful and objective information about Belarus, without hyperbole or acrimony. It has provided also an important alternative source of news and information about events within the country that is often impossible to ascertain either in the Western media or in the official press in Belarus itself. Its longevity is a result of the dedication of some very committed and industrious individuals, among whom I would single out editors Joe Arciuch and George Stankevich. Not only have they managed to produce an exciting quarterly journal for 25 years, but also they have recruited a young group of scholars and intellectuals around them that has ensured that the future is as bright as the past. To the next 25 years and congratulations to you all!

David R. Marples, Distinguished University Professor, University of Alberta President, NAABS

BELARUSIAN INSTITUTE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES, Inc.

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March 2013

To: BELARUSIAN REVIEW
Mr. George Stankevich, Editor
Mr. Joe Arciuch, Editor-At-Large

Gentlemen:

At the start of the 25th year of publication of your valuable quarterly we sincerely congratulate you on such a remarkable achievement and express our gratitude to an impressive number of devoted contributors who have been informing the English speaking world about events and developments in Belarus.

Over two thousand pages of independent analyses and informative reports published in BELARUSIAN REVIEW over these years constitute a rich source of facts and ideas for a better comprehension of Belarus and Belarusica at a crucial time in their history.

With very best wishes to you personally and to all your contributors –

Dr. Vitaut Kipel, President
Dr. Jan Zaprudnik, Vice-President

GREETINGS from RADA Of the Belarusian Democratic Republic

On Behalf of the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Exile, I am pleased to congratulate the publishers, the editors, and the many authors who have contributed to the success of Belarusian Review since its foundation in 1988.

The members of the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic feel especially indebted to Mr. Joe Arciuch, who took the initiative to begin publishing this overdue English source of information about a land which for many years had been the best kept secret of Europe.

The impact of Belarusian Review on the broad-based knowledge of Belarus in the English speaking world has become invaluable, especially after the election in 1994 of Aleksandr Lukashenka as President of the Republic of Belarus. Belarusian Review has played an important and consistent role in exposing Mr. Lukashenka's self-serving goals and ideologies. This publication has become a central resource for all those who dream of a free Belarusian Republic of Belarus.

Ivonka J. Survilla, President
Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic
in Exile

GREETINGS from the Center for Belarusian Studies

The Center for Belarusian Studies is pleased to offer its congratulations to Belarusian Review on the occasion of its twenty-fifth anniversary. This respected publication has become a fundamental resource for discourse about Belarus. Established by Joe Archiuch at a time when information about developments in Belarus was not easily available to English-speaking readers, Belarusian Review became the focal point for commentaries and analyses about the state of political and cultural energies affecting Belarus. The respected contributors and distinguished editors active since the first issue in 1988 are a testament to the quality and importance of this publication in calling attention to Belarus in the academy and at the policy level. We at the Center are proud to hold a complete collection of Belarusian Review in our archives. We look forward to the continued role the Belarusian Review will play in bringing Belarus to the public sphere.

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FEATURES

Understanding Kalinoŭski

By Zachar Šybieka

Today there are many disputes concerning the person of Kastuś Kalinoŭski. Intelectuals engaged in the national discourse are disturbed by the fact that some "court historians" do not consider the leader of the 1863 anti-tsarist uprising in Belarus a national hero. However, it is not sufficient to point out the absurd views on Belarusian history, held by persons strongly pro-Russian. It is important that Belarusians themselves understand Kalinoŭski. And to understand him means to understand 19th century Belarus' history, i.e. becoming a patriot of Belarus. Yet, in order to understand him and his era, one has to look at that distant past through our hero's eyes.

to understand Kalinouski means to understand 19th century history of Belarus

One should not be concerned that Kalinouski fought for the revival of the Grand Duchy of Litva (GDL), rather than that of Belarus. During his lifetime the official term "Belarus" for the entire nation did not exist, with the exception of the region bordering Russia. Thus he could fight only for what did exist— for the revival of the GDL, destroyed by the expanding Russian empire. He saw the revived and renewed Grand Duchy as Belarusian in nature; this was evident by his efforts to revive the Uniate (Greek Catholic) church, distinct from the Russian orthodoxy and alien to both Poles and Lithuanians, who are now and were then generally Roman Catholics. It was further supported by the fact that he addressed his compatriots in their native language (..."my dear brothers, dear peasants," "my dear people"), and sacrificed his life for it. He did not mince words when addressing the polonized landowners; he clearly spoke about the Fatherland, distancing himself from Poland, while nevertheless exhorting his *dziaciuki* (lads) to follow the example of Polish peasants in their struggle for freedom.[1]

Unfortunately, no clear evidence exists as to what place did the Belarusian leader envision for Jews and the present-day Lithuanians in the revived GDL. His modest written heritage leaves little room for serious contemplation regarding this topic. Nevertheless, Kalinoŭski did most likely see the Grand Duchy as a prototype of a modern state, albeit inhabited by various ethnic groups with equal rights. He made no reference to the ancestors of present-day Lithuanians, and was favorably disposed toward Jews. In his "Letters from beneath the Gallows"[2] he wrote that after the landowners had switched to the insurgents' side, the Muscovites even tried in vain to join the Jewish brotherhoods, in order to save themselves. However, the Jews were not ready to accept "those who have drunk a lot

of Jewish tears and blood." Yet, nowhere did Kalinouski refer to Jews as allies. Possibly, because at that time the Jewish community was still living its isolated religious life, not engaging in politics, and even hoping that Tsar Alexander II will expand its rights.[3]

If his dream had been realized, then the country of present Belarusians would be called Litva, and they themselves would be called Litvins, Why then have our ancestors not pursued the Litvin project of creating the present nation under the name "Grand Duchy of Litva," or "Litva," as proposed by Kalinoŭski , and instead chose that of "Belarus"? Why have they begun realizing the national project "Belarus"? Why did the originally regional name "Belarus" become firmly established at the end of the 19th and in the beginning of the 20th centuries and eventually was applied to the entire ethnic territory of present Belarusians?

In the past Belarusians were known as Litvins

In order to answer this question, one must know what kind of state was the GDL, and how it should be treated historically. Lack of this knowledge remains now one of the fundamental problems in the present Belarusian historiography. In order to find the answer, let us reduce the problem to its simplest terms: the full name of the state was the "Grand Duchy of Litva, Ruthenia and Samogitia." To refer to the GDL under its full name did not gain acceptance in the present world-wide historiography. The possible reason for this lack of acceptance may be the reluctance by the latter-day researchers to critically review and revise their original concepts of considering the GDL a Baltic state or Lithuanian in the present meaning. In my opinion, the full name of the Grand Duchy confirms the existence and the role of three nations in this state; Belarusians, Ukrainians, and the ancestors of present-day Lithuanians; at that time they were called Litvins, Ruthenians and Samogitians, respectively.

After the break-up of the Soviet Union, these peoples were able to resume their active national life, and began claiming the GDL legacy. Attempts to solve the problem in exclusive terms, according to the principle - this state was ours, not yours - turned out to be counterproductive and will never lead to an understanding among Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Lithuanians, Therefore, in my opinion, it is neither accurate nor worthwhile to assign to the medieval state a current national definition; it wasn't done by Kalinoŭski, either. What's more - the present nations i the present nations just did not exist in the era of GDL.. It was simply a multi-ethnic statestate that became the cradle of the present national states: Belarus, Lithuania, and Ukraine. All these peoples have the non-exclusive right right to claim the historical and cultural legacy of the Grand Duchy of Litva, Ruthenia, and Samogitia.

We may thus conclude that classifying Belarus as a nation without history, as claimed by some researchers, is not correct. . The myths about Belarusians' ages-old unity with Russians, and their conquest by Lithuanians were created on order of the Russian empress Catherine II (1762-1796) after the annexation of the Grand Duchy of Litva, Ruthenia, and Samogitia. These myths were further "validated" by a wholesale revision and century-long destruction of historical documents that did not support the tsarist regime's desired results. The persons, who like Kalinoŭski, knew the country's real history, and haven't forgotten it, fought the czarist falsifications and the ongoing oppression. Knowing his people's history well, he defended its right to claim the true historical and cultural legacy of the medieval Duchy.

To compound the injury to Belarusians' historical legacy, these tsarist myths were later adopted by historians from Poland, Lithuania, the Soviet Union, and in due course, practically the entire world. The world-wide historiography has until recently viewed the Russian-inspired falsification as the true history of Belarus, ranging from the ancient times until the collapse of tsarist Russia in 1917. The image of the GDL had been pushed out of the Belarusian people's memory, substantially weakening its national spirit.

Back at the middle of the 19th century, Russia's imperial government divided the territory of the annexed Grand Duchy into Lithuania and Belarus, precisely into the Lithuanian and Belarusian general governorships, although formerly the Grand Duchy consisted of more provinces: Litva, Ruthenia, Samogitia, Palessie and others. The term "Belorussia" had a marginal usage in Russia's lexicon. The division of the GDL into Belarus and Lithuania made easier the absorption of the lands annexed by Russia. The absorption was conducted in two stages: first Belarus, and then Lithuania. Even though the territory of the former GDL had always exhibited some regional diversity, it continued to preserve its unofficial unity and distinctiveness as a separate region of the Russian empire until its breakup. The works of poet Adam Mickiewicz and his activity on behalf of the land of his birth, symbolize the territorial unity of the former GDL. Kalinoŭski also perceived his country as a united entity, and was thus motivated in the struggle for its liberation from the tsarist oppression of the previous six decades.

The country was also united by its traditions and memory, by the unified code of laws (officially in use until 1840), by the cohabitation with the huge Jewish community that was locked in the Pale of Settlement, and also by the czarist policy of discrimination against the local population. The former GDL remained in the sphere of European influence and traditions, and Kalinoŭski understood the value of these influences, and the resulting moral advantage of his fatherland over Russia's despotism. This is why he treated this state with contempt, and appealed to Russian peasants to join him in the common struggle against the autocratic regime. The current detractors of the Belarusian leader 's stature somehow do not notice - or do not know - this last nuance in Kalinoŭski's views. One gets the impression that they are quite ready to execute him as Russia's enemy for the second time.

Actually, in the subconscience of the people in the annexed territory, the name ”Litva.” was the only one that continued to last. The term ”Belarus” at first acquired a more common usage only in borderlands with Russia. And even there, in Viciebsk and Mahiliou gubernias, in the first half of the 19th century, intellectuals considered themselves Litvins. For example, the Belarusian-language writer and translator from the Viciebsk region, Arciom Viaryha-Dareuski (1816-1884) identified himself and the language he used that way.[4] (He is best known for translating Mickiewicz's poem *Konrad Wallenrod*.)

After the anti-tsarist uprising of 1830/31 it became obvious that assigning terms ”Lithuania” and ”Belarus” to the annexed territories was impeding the country's total incorporation into the empire, since it was awakening regional identity in their populations. Tsar Nikolas II eventually prohibited the practice of referring to these gubernias as Belarusian and Lithuanian. The following note was included in the minutes of Russian cabinet meeting held on June 26, 1840: ”In the case of presenting the emperor with a decree referring to Belarusian and Lithuanian gubernias, Gosudar, after crossing out the terms Belarusian and Lithuanian, ordered the decree to be rewritten so that individual gubernias are named separately, namely Vitebsk, Mogilev, Vilna, Grodno (according to their Russian spelling). Hereafter, this rule should be followed, referring to these gubernias only by their individual names.”[5] The Tsar's order had its results. The official terminology began by first getting rid of the term ”Lithuania.” The same year the official use of the GDL code of laws was ultimately forbidden. Official usage of the term ”Belarus” lasted somewhat longer while the process of eliminating any reference to or even destroying the cultural heritage of the Grand Duchy was under way. Litva no longer existed for the tsarist authorities.(It was later replaced by the geographic term — North-West Land.)

In 1863 the insurgents from the present Lithuania and Belarus were still fighting for the rebirth of the unitary GDL. Their left wing expected support from the peasants. The moderate and more pragmatic wing was hoping for the support from western countries of Europe. They saw such support as the only way to break loose from Russian subjugation; since hopes for the outpouring of local support or Russia's democratization did not appear to be realistic. Yet the Europeans did not help the insurgents, unlike the warriors from the Poland-Litva Commonwealth, who earlier stopped the Ottoman forces at Vienna. As a result, the goal of insurgents, led by Kalinoŭski, to revive the GDL as an independent state, ended in defeat for the ancestors of Belarusians , along with the destruction of the local elites. There remained no one left to publicly defend the historical legacy of the GDL for the contemporary Belarusians.

The resulting situation coupled with the tsarist policy of destroying the Litva heritage, gave the Lithuanian ancestors, with help from Prussia, an advantage in claiming the heritage of the Grand Duchy and the name Lithuania, a Latinized version of the name Litva. Earlier they called themselves Žemaičiai and Aukštaičiai, or in Latin — Samogitians and Aukshtaitians (possibly even Lithuanians). The Russian authorities did little to stop the Lithuanian national movement, since for them it was even useful. The ancestors of present Belarusians were deprived of a great historical legacy, which then became associated with an ethnos smaller in population and territory. Deprived of knowledge about their past, contemporary Belarusians were then easier to turn into Russians. Therefore, the initial predominance of the Lithuanian nation-building over that of the Belarusian one, was made possible, among other reasons, by the policies of of both Prussia and Russia. They have not especially supported the Lithuanian national movement , yet they were not impeding it, which was true especially for Prussia.

Mikhail Muravyov, the Russian governor-general in the city of Vilnia, has ordered the execution by hanging of Kastuś Kalinoŭski. With this order , he has weakened the more promising Litvin project of creating the modern Belarusian nation. The subsequent events, affected by national ignorance about the Grand Duchy, occurred after Kalinoŭski's death. My experience in studying Belarus' history convinces me that Kalinoŭski's successors had little chance to realize his dream of reviving the Grand Duchy and becoming Litvins. Nonetheless, the fact that the Belarusians were known as Litvins, is worth remembering. Taking into account everything that was presented so far, the figure of Kastuś Kalinoŭski and his role in Belarusians' struggle for freedom has probably become easier to comprehend. He wanted to revive the Grand Duchy of Litva as a Belarusian state, independent from Russia, and was the first to declare the right of his people to claim the GDL legacy. Being a realist, he wanted to accomplish it in alliance with the Polish people. He wanted to revive the Uniate church as a leading confession for his compatriots, since being aware of the negative effects of the confrontation between the Catholic and Orthodox churches in his country, he first understood the role of the Uniate church in his people's fight for self-preservation.

After the events of 1863, many years would pass, before the Belarusian people would begin their full-fledged national life. Herein lies the tragedy of their earlier national leader.

FOOTNOTES:

1.: “Мужыцквя праўда”. № 1-7. http://zheneok.blog.tut.by/2010/12/16/muzhyitskaya-prauda-1-7/.

2. “Пісьмы з-пад шыбеніцы”. http://zheneok.blog.tut.by/2010/12/16/muzhyitskaya-prauda-1-7/.

3. Лев Дейч. Роль евреев в русском революционном движении. Т. I. Берлин, 1923. С. 14-15.

4. Катлярчук, Андрэй. Нацыянальнае канструяваньне Міцкевіча, або What Tomas Venclova did not say in. Harvard // ARCHE. 2006. С. 57—58

5. ЦГАРФ, ф. 1266, оп. 1, д.3,л.75.

David Marples on Political Scientists' Meeting With Lukashenka: Analysts cannot Be Advocates

The recent meeting of Lukashenka and a group of US political scientists has triggered controversial reactions both in Belarus and abroad. David Marples offers comments on it in an interview with Pavol Demeš, a Transatlantic Fellow at the German Marshall Fund's office in Bratislava, Slovakia.

Pavol Demeš: *You are one of the best known Western authors on Belarus. You also contribute regularly to the prominent Jamestown Foundation web site . The President of this Foundation and two contributing analysts were recently received by Aliaksandr Lukashenka, which created outrage among the Belarusian democratic community. Were you considering being a part of this team? How do you assess this visit?*

David Marples: I was not informed about it at any time. Grigory Ioffe and I have the same status at the Jamestown Foundation, i.e. we are freelance contributors on Belarus. Thus the presence of Prof. Ioffe at the meeting with the president of Belarus is his own affair. But the fact that the meeting included the president of Jamestown and the chief writer for the Eurasian Daily Monitor indicates that it was not completely informal. People do not simply drop in on Aliaksandr Lukashenka. And a reciprocal visit is not possible because the president of Belarus is not allowed at present to set foot in the United States. Thus the US representatives were meeting with a man their own government has deemed persona non grata. Why? Were they pleading for the release of **Mikalai Statkevich, Paval Sieviarynets,** or **Dzmitry Dashkevich?** Evidently not. I have read three reports of the encounter and they all emphasize that the visitors stressed that Lukashenka has an image problem in the West, which is largely the fault of an irresponsible media; that he has released prisoners who have not "even" asked for a pardon; that both sides should be realistic and start to consider a new dialogue.

I have to confess that when I read the comments about the Western media, the images from December 19-20, 2010 came to my mind - presidential candidate **Andrei Sannikau** lying on the floor on Independence Square, unconscious; his wife beaten against the windshield of a car; Niakliayeu beaten and then later dragged from his hospital bed; 7 of the 9 candidates in prison cells on the night of the election day. And it was a similar situation in March 2006.

And what has changed exactly since? Dashkevich's sentence was just increased, Sannikau and Mikhalevich have joined Pazniak and others as refugees from their homeland, the editor of ARCHE, the only free intellectual journal in Belarus, has now taken the same route. Hundreds of Belarusian students now study outside the country and have started to form sizeable communities in Warsaw, Vilnius, and other cities. I did not see any of these names featuring in the conversation. And whether anyone asked for a pardon is surely immaterial - a pardon for what, exactly?

In my view, the visit shows either astonishing naivety or a deep cynicism concerning the need to respect fundamental freedoms. Why single out the president of Belarus for such benign treatment?

PD: *Under what conditions should Western analysts accept invitations from Aliaksandr Lukashenka or other authoritarian leaders? Would you consider it acceptable if they were hosted by similar leaders?*

DM: I think it might be acceptable if the invitation included current and former political prisoners, as well as opposition leaders in a round-table setting. But this should happen only in a situation in which Belarus responded to basic requests for the release of all prisoners, a free media, and freedom of speech and assembly (in every sense of the latter word). And then the question arises of the circumstances of the recent meeting--why then and why in such a format? Why would a think-tank like Jamestown throw-ostensibly-support behind the most brutal regime in Europe? At the very least it suggests a basic disagreement with US (and EU) policy.

PD: *How do you see the role of Western analysts in the human rights area, namely in releasing political prisoners? Did the recent visit by the Jamestown delegation address this issue?*

DM: I think it's a topic that we have to treat with caution. Analysts cannot be advocates. We cannot openly take sides without losing some credibility. In the past I have not taken part in meetings with the opposition or in public demonstrations in Minsk and other places. I try to conduct research--and I am an historian as well as someone who analyzes contemporary politics, so that is the logical way to behave. But I think we have an obligation to report honestly on what we see, however limited by lack of access and shortage of time. We do not live in Belarus, and perhaps we do not comprehend some aspects of everyday life. Even when we are there we move in certain circles. We communicate with intellectuals and academics rather than collective farmers or industrial workers. Yet we still get an impression, and by reading and through conversations we can reach some understanding of society.

In my view, this meeting implicitly criticizes many from the West who know (and love) Belarus and try to assess honestly the internal situation. I have spent extensive time in my career in Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia. It is possible to make comparisons. And Belarus is somewhat less "criminal" than its two neighbours in terms of things like stealing natural resources, but undoubtedly more brutal and vindictive. Russia today has been said by some to have "adopted" Belarusian policies or "Lukashism." Admittedly it has become increasingly authoritarian under Vladimir Putin. Ukraine is not really on the same page, although the current leadership is astonish-

ingly corrupt. Russia and Ukraine have both had several presidents. Belarus has had only one. True, this is not the worst dictatorship on the planet, but it has become worse, rather than better, over time, particularly during harsher economic times, when the president no longer has access to cheap Russian supplies of oil and gas. The enhanced power of the KGB, especially, but also the internal police, are a cause of deep concern.

From the published reports, these issues never came up in the meeting. Instead, whatever critiques were launched pertained to the "sanctions" and the Western media. The question why the West should start a new dialogue with official Minsk was never broached, but presumably it was linked to two perceptions:

1) that Belarus and Lukashenka serve as some kind of bulwark or buffer state against Russian expansion or influence westward--the image of a bold leader standing up to a rapacious bully out to steal its resources.

2) that the EU and Belarus must operate as equals - Belarus should not be treated like a child, a comment I cited recently from German analyst Alexander Rahr.

The first perception is nonsense. Lukashenka serves only himself and his own authority. Regarding the second, perhaps there is an element of condescension in the tone with which Belarus is addressed today. But that arises naturally from intra-European discussions, of which Minsk is a part, and voluntarily so. When the country joined the Eastern Partnership, then it accepted certain principles, including an agreement to reform its society, introduce more democratization, etc. So Western analysts cannot now turn around and say it is being treated unfairly. And I agree that sanctions are not an ideal policy. Yet some response to the outrageous events in Belarus is necessary. What kind of world would we have if we simply took the view: it's an internal affair, let us simply accept Belarus for what it has become and welcome Lukashenka as a friend into the parliaments of European capitals. Not only would this be a dereliction of duty, it would be grossly insulting to those who have tried to work within the Belarusian system, in elections, in opposition parties and movements, in cultural societies, and in NGOs to change society.

That they have thus far failed reflects less a lack of popularity than the fact that they regime has singled them out for various kinds of harassment. Thus I see little reason for these modern-day appeasers to be offering soothing advice to the "misunderstood" president.

Source: Charter97 Press Center, January 30, 2013

Belarusian Review Editor's Note: This article is republished with permission of Pavol Demeš and David Marples. After this interview was conducted, the Jamestown Foundation issued a bulletin in wich the meeting was described as part of a "fact-finding mission" to Belarus.

Grigory Ioffe's Misunderstood Belarus

By Kiryl Kascian

Grigory Ioffe, a Moscow born and raised professor of geography at Radford University, is known as an expert on Belarus. With his articles about Belarus, he is a regular contributor to the renowned Jamestown Foundation's *Eurasia Daily Monitor*. He is also the author of the book *Understanding Belarus and How Western Foreign Policy Misses the Mark* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield 2008), which is rooted to a series of Ioffe's articles in *Europe-Asia Studies* in 2003 and 2004.

Recently Professor Ioffe along with the Jamestown Foundation president Glen E. Howard and two more influential US political scientists, Vladimir Socor and Janusz Bugajski, participated in a meeting with the Belarusian president Aliaksandr Lukashenka. The very fact of this event has focused attention on the state of analyses of Belarus' political and social situation produced by western experts. Recalling that for Ioffe it was not the first meeting with Lukashenka, the question is whether his regular expertise at the EDM or elsewhere could really qualitatively influence the coverage and analysis of Belarus-related events in the West? In terms of Ioffe's works it may be rephrased as whether Ioffe's viewpoint would be able to contribute to *understanding Belarus* in the West?

Thus, in this text I will explore Ioffe's emphasis on the need for *understanding Belarus* by focusing on the way he portrays Belarus in his regular analyses at the EDM. So, in the first part of the text I will apply his arguments and causal explanations of the reasons that have predetermined the current state of affairs in order to sketch an image of Belarus *à* la Ioffe. In the second part this image will be analyzed in order to answer the question whether Ioffe's viewpoint is contributing to *understanding Belarus* in the West. It is impossible and in fact unnecessary to analyze the dozens of texts written by Ioffe for EDM. Instead, I will focus chronologically on three articles, which I consider fundamental in *understanding* Ioffe's perception of Belarus, namely *Who is losing Belarus?* (01.02.2012), *Belarus defies clichés* (20.06.2012), and *Belarus and Lithuania: the estranged brethren* (21.11.2012).

White almost-Russia alias Belarus *à* la Ioffe

The first text *Who is losing Belarus?* is a Ioffe-style reflection on Zbigniew Brzezinski's list of eight "geopolitically endangered species," which among others include Belarus, facing annexation by Russia. Ioffe states that it would be "a mistake to discuss the most recent surge in Belarus's dependency on Russia only in economic terms." He refers to "cultural preconditions" of this economic dependency largely underestimated by the West in designing their policies towards Belarus. Ioffe stresses that Belarus "remains firmly attached to Russia's cultural space" while Belarusians do not treat Russian actors, writers and musicians as foreigners. He further refers to the study of Nina Miachkouskaya emphasizing the apparently marginal and even further marginalizing role of the Belarusian language

in the Belarusian segment of the internet and generally in Belarusian society, particularly among the country's urban population, most of which have learned Belarusian not in the family or school but on their own. Ioffe transmits Miachkouskaya's conclusion that the language is "more and more bookish, elitist and detached from every day communication," performing essentially "professional, symbolic and ideological purposes." She, as Ioffe notes, "questions Belarus's cultural sovereignty which depends on how attractive and unique the information content in Belarus is" since the current domestic content "may not be enough to sustain the nation and one's pride of this nation." Ioffe proceeds with reference to the regular IISEPS polls on the geopolitical choice of Belarus between potential EU membership and joining Russia and on the proximity of Belarusians either to Russians or to Europeans. He explains the gap between the data of the former (the two available options enjoy roughly equal support) and the latter (the Russian option prevails by almost four times) through the required sacrifice of cultural leanings in taking the EU His overall conclusion is that "Russia is winning the tug of war for Belarus due to its businesslike Belarus policy, …and not because of the decline in the overall America's power."

In his next article *Belarus defies clichés* Ioffe begins eloquently with a statement that "after more than twenty years of statehood, Belarusians have not developed a distinctive national identity." Recalling the language as the most important marker of national identity in Europe, Ioffe argues that "Belarus resides almost entirely within a Russian language-based information space." He refers to a Belarus national survey on the use and mass attitude to the Belarusian language produced by NovAK, a Minsk-based independent sociological firm. Ioffe sums up that nearly a half or slightly more Belarusians oppose the broadening of the national language usage in business, army and judiciary while the non-communication in the titular language is explained through the lack of a language milieu or ignorance. He also argues that the Russian language has 35% more native speakers in Belarus than the titular language, provided the respondents are allowed to declare more than one language as their native one. He cites statistics of contacts and visits by Belarusians of two "centers of gravity in Europe," namely Russia and the EU, concluding that "the wind from the east prevails over the wind from the west." Notably while referring to the above-mentioned IISEPS poll on the geopolitical choice of Belarus, Ioffe summarizes that "by now Russia has reclaimed its geopolitical advantage." In conclusion he stresses that there are apparent swings of "Belarusians' cultural affinity" and admits "Minsk's ability to maintain Moscow at arm's length."

The text entitled *Belarus and Lithuania: the estranged brethren* brings a somewhat deeper historical dimension to the portrait of Belarus by Ioffe. He recalls that "both Belarusians and Lithuanians were subjects of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (1253–1569), a quintessentially "European" entity that used what some experts call Old Belarusian as its official language." Ioffe stresses that the Duchy of Lithuania represents the key milestone for Lithuanian national identity, while "Belarusians have at least two historical narratives in conflict with each other. And for one of them—embraced by the Belarusian opposition—Belarus is also the successor to the Grand Duchy." He parallels the Belarusian-Lithuanian historical debate on the GDL succession with the Russian-Ukrainian one on the role of Kievan Rus as the cradle of their statehoods. However, Ioffe stresses that: "in the case of Belarus, however, a belief in the Grand Duchy lineage is not embraced by a larger society for which historical ties with Russia come across as more natural and meaningful." Thus, the former GDL subjects "parted ways," as "Belarusians en masse were more concerned with retaining their ties with Mother Russia" whilst "for Lithuanians the demise of the Soviet Union marked the beginning of their "return to Europe."

Summing up the above-mentioned observations of an expert, it is possible to sketch a picture of Belarus à la Ioffe:

> *Belarus is a country located between two "centers of gravity in Europe" (EU and Russia) which "after more than twenty years of statehood… have not developed a distinctive national identity" and "remains firmly attached to Russia's cultural space." It is an object for geopolitical competition of these two "centers of gravity", and it is Russia that is winning "the tug of war for Belarus" and "has reclaimed its geopolitical advantage" due to its "businesslike Belarus policy" and the fact that "Belarusians en masse… [are] concerned with retaining their ties with Mother Russia," whilst "Western foreign policy misses the mark."*

Maintenance of the Cold-war-style thinking alias defying clichés

Understanding may be defined as "the capacity to use current knowledge, concepts, and skills to illuminate new problems or unanticipated issues" (Gardner and Boix-Mansilla, 1999: 79). It is about "acquiring and retaining a network of concepts and principles about some domain that accurately represents key phenomena and their interrelationships and that can be engaged flexibly when pertinent to accomplish diverse, sometimes novel objectives" (Fetovich, Spiro, and Coulson, 1993:181). Understanding has also operational dimension as "the ability to answer those questions concerning the contents of a text which a typical human reader would be able to answer after having read the text" (Lockman and Klappholz, 1983: 59). These three definitions imply two key aspects. First, understanding has strong linkage to causality that brings about the consequences and their effects into evaluation. Second, the contents of any book or an article may have significant impact on the formation of the perception of things by its readers and influence their understanding. In other words, to understand means not only to provide answers to the question *what?*, but also to supply them with essential argumentation that enables to get the answers to the questions *how?* and more importantly *why?* In order to maintain a comprehensive analysis aimed at in-depth understanding of a research subject, it is not sufficient to provide, describe or characterize facts, figures or events, it is necessary to find their roots and pursue the analysis based on the

causal explanation of the actual state of things.

Thus, it is quite obvious, that any critique of Ioffe cannot be based on the facts and data he explores for his expertise since they might be credible just by the fact of their existence. It is more relevant to settle a number of whys and hows appearing in Ioffe's texts in order to assess their contribution to understanding Belarus. In order to do so, it is necessary to start with how he portrays Belarus.

Belarus is depicted as a country located between two major "centers of gravity." In Ioffe's interpretation, its location makes Belarus an object of a "war" between these two centres in which Russia "has reclaimed its geopolitical advantage." Putting Belarus into this scheme implies that in any case the country has to make a choice, either to form an alliance with either the EU or Russia. This framework is backed by Ioffe's reference to a regular public opinion poll on the geopolitical choices of Belarusians produced by the IISEPS. The question of this poll has three possible answers – integration with Russia, joining the EU, and don't know/no answer. This set of possible answers implies that the logic behind this poll is apparently the same as that of Ioffe's analysis as it is based on the premise of Belarus' location between these two global players. Thus, the poll's framework represents an attempt to push respondents to choose between Russia and the EU leaving no room for any other option, whatever it may be called – neutrality or engaging all. Simultaneously, application of this framework by Ioffe leads us to two essential conclusions. First, such an approach treats Belarus merely as an object of international politics but not its subject, limiting the country's capacity for maneuver to taking an obligatory decision whether to ally with Russia or the EU. Second, leaving almost no room for any alternative option for Belarus other than the ultimate taking of sides, this framework "tends to operate with a Cold War style mind-sets." Hence, the analysis framework offered by Ioffe explicitly excludes Belarus' freedom of political action, which in reality goes beyond these two "centers of gravity." First, taking sides with one of these two global players at the expense of other potential allies is per se costly and evidently inconsistent with Belarus' own interests. Second, it does not reflect an apparent involvement of other centers of gravity (for example, China), in which Belarus (or any other country) might seek to engage to diversify its foreign policy and economy as well as to promote its national interests.

to understand means not only to provide answers to the question *what?*, but also to supply them with essential argumentation that enables to get the answers to the questions *how?* and more importantly *why?*

In other words, Belarus in Ioffe's terms cannot sustain itself and must ultimately choose with whom to ally. Ioffe thus tries to advocate Belarus' pro-Russian choice that ostensibly is backed by Belarusian popular interests in retaining their ties with "Mother Russia," Belarus' allegiance to the Russian cultural space, and Russia's "businesslike Belarus policy."

The first argument is based on the aforementioned IISEPS poll that lacks a third option (neutrality/engaging all) and therefore does not fully reflect the political reality. In other words, the inclusion of an answer "*Belarus to develop as an independent state without adherence to the EU or Russian-led Customs Union*" might have been the most attractive option for the respondents completely undermining the validity of this poll and all the analytical frameworks based on it.

The second argument is based on the language issue, in which Ioffe tries to raise another question, namely the apparent reluctance of Belarusians to use their mother tongue. He states that language is the most important marker of national identity in Europe and thus links the language issue with identity in order to claim that "after more than twenty years of statehood, Belarusians have not developed a distinctive national identity." Should we bring any causality or comparison into this framework, we would see the bias of Ioffe's approach. Indeed, the language situation in Belarus raises many different evaluations, which might be described as a sort of abnormal bilingualism. However, Belarusians are not unique in this situation. A number of examples from Ireland, Scotland, Catalonia or Ukraine show that language is important component for identity, but by no means the only one. To put it succinctly, everyday usage of English instead of Gaelic or Scots does not turn an Irishman or a Scotsman into an Englishman. Moreover, Ioffe contradicts himself in stating that Belarusian is used for "symbolic and ideological purposes," which have a very high degree of acceptance in the Belarusian society beyond its political lines. Furthermore, he does not analyze whether the state has provided sufficient language facilities for learning Belarusian. Thus, in some areas of life Belarusian, while not forbidden, is not promoted, meaning that its supporters must either adapt to the existing situation or need to defend their rights. Most people apparently choose the first option. Hence, should the state provide more language facilities aimed at full-fledged promotion of the Belarusian language, the number of those who declare Belarusian as their mother tongue and those who actually use it in their everyday life would approach each other through the increase of the number of actual speakers. Finally, Ioffe ignores the Belarusian ethnic kin's ability to assimilate minorities (including the Russian one) within the Belarusian nation-state (a phrase that characterizes the Republic of Belarus both according to the law and population structure), which is supported by the data of two population censuses conducted in Belarus after it became independent. In this criterion Belarus hardly differs from any country of the CEE.

The third argument about Russia's geopolitical advantage also largely rests on the aforementioned IISEPS poll since it is measured by comparison with the EU. It is obvious that Russia remains the most important political and economic ally of Minsk but it is also plain that this choice has a rational explanation through the countries' common

Soviet past and the role of Belarus of an "assembly plant" in the USSR. Thus, it is the rather rational economic interests of Belarus but not abstract "cultural preconditions" of this economic cooperation mentioned by Ioffe, which define the choice in favor of Russia. The common Soviet-formed political culture of the Belarusian and Russian leadership just simplifies the decision-making process, making it easier for them to understand each other's needs and put up a brave front even when it seems that hardly any solution may be found. However, the very same kind of cooperation may be observed in Belarus' relations with Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and most other ex-Soviet countries. It is also worth mentioning that the IISEPS poll framework tries to compare real integration with Russia, which is ready to work here and now, with the virtual process of Belarus joining the EU, which might occur sometime in the future. To summarize, Ioffe's analysis follows that of the IISEPS in trying to compare two situations: a real and a virtual one, even though the latter does not exclude a full-fledged economic cooperation of Belarus with the EU and its member states.

It is also significant that within Ioffe's framework the European Union is largely equated with Europe and portrayed as a rather established institution with common interests and a single foreign policy. Yet despite certain progress achieved in the EU on a common approach towards its foreign policy, it is unlikely that in the near future it would supersede the national interests of its member states. In other words, the EU geopolitical interest toward Belarus might differ from the geopolitical interests of its member states – while for Portugal or Malta it does not have any significant role, Latvia, Lithuania or Poland might see their relations with Belarus among their top-priorities, often based on the common cultural and historical ties, which are at least as important as the ties between Belarus and Russia.

Thus, it seems relevant to make a short causal analysis on the reference towards a common historical past with Lithuania made by Ioffe in one the texts analyzed in this article. Ioffe is absolutely right in stating that the Duchy of Lithuania represents the key milestone for Lithuanian national identity. This statehood tradition is also referred to in the Lithuania's Constitution. However, Lithuanians do not have any other ancient statehood tradition to which to refer. Belarus' Constitution cites "the centuries-old history of development of Belarusian statehood," which apparently encompassed not only the Grand Duchy of Lithuania but also pre-GDL state formations on Belarusian territory such as the Duchies of Polack and Turaŭ. The vision of the ancient Grand Duchy of Lithuania and annexation of Belarus by Russian Empire at the website of the Belarus President rather comply with the "national" interpretation of the Belarusian history, as does the interpretation of the pre-Soviet development of the Belarusian statehood and culture in the country's official ideology. Therefore, Ioffe's statement concerning two conflicting historical narratives in Belarus is somewhat outdated. Furthermore, according to a survey conducted by "Budźma", BISS and NovAK, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania with 38.1% was the most popular answer to the question on the cradle of Belarusian statehood, followed by further 17.7% responses supporting the Duchies of Polack and Turaŭ. In other words, the majority of Belarusians see the pre-Russian and pre-Soviet state formations as the cradles of the Belarusian national statehood, proving that Ioffe's statement that "in the case of Belarus… a belief in the Grand Duchy lineage is not embraced by a larger society for which historical ties with Russia come across as more natural and meaningful" is inconsistent and not supported by any substantial argumentation.

The well-known Belarusian historian Aleś Smalianĉuk describes Belarusian Soviet history as a repressed science that through its ideologization and falsification of historical facts obliged the nation to learn a history that their ancestors never experienced. As a result, the deformation of national identity had been taking place gradually for at least two sequential generations of Belarusians. However, despite all these factors, within more than 20 years of Belarus independence the "national" interpretation of the Belarusian history, even though not a homogeneous one, irreversibly started to monopolize the Belarusian historical narrative. In this regard, Ioffe's references to the "cultural preconditions" of Belarus' dependency on Russia and the country's firm attachment to Russia's cultural space largely resemble the concept of the so-called "Old Russian people" imposed by the Soviet authorities after the Second World War, which subordinated official Belarusian history to a Russian-centric view, filled with platitudes about the centuries-long struggle of the Belarusians and Ukrainians for "re-unification" with the fraternal Russian people.

In his *Belarus defies clichés* Ioffe rightfully admits: "the cliché-ridden thinking is inadequate for understanding Belarus." However, he himself only adds to the spreading of clichés about this European country, which neither contribute to an understanding of it by the West, nor result in the maintenance and development of effective Western policies towards Belarus.

US Officials Hold Talks in Minsk

A delegation of the US Department of State stayed in Minsk between January 27 and 29, holding meetings with government officials and opposition politicians.

The delegation, which was led by Daniel Rosenblum, coordinator of US assistance to Europe and Eurasia, met with representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, of Healthcare, and of Labor and Social Security.

On the final day of the visit, Mr. Rosenblum met with Iryna Veshtard, leader of the Hramada Belarusian Social Democratic Party; Syarhey Kalyakin, chairman of the Spravedlivy Mir (Just World) Belarusian Party of the Left; Anatol Lyabedzka, chairman of the United Civic Party; Alyaksandr Milinkevich, leader of the Movement for Freedom; Uladzimir Nyaklyayew, leader of the "Tell the Truth!" movement; Vital Rymashewski, a co-chairman of the Belarusian Christian Democracy party; and Belarusian Popular Front leader Alyaksey Yanukevich.

As Mr. Lyabedzka told BelaPAN, the meeting, which lasted for two and a half hours, focused on the situation in Belarus. Subjects such as political prisoners, the disappearances of Alyaksandr Lukashenka`s prominent political opponents, free elections, and the opposition camp`s possible dialogue with the government were under discussion.

The release of political prisoners is the United States` number one priority in Belarus, while human rights respect and free elections also top Washington`s agenda, Mr. Lyabedzka said. "Rymashewski and I put an emphasis on the importance of holding free elections. If we fail to secure that, then it is only the names of those held in pretrial detention centers that will change after another election, and everything will start afresh," he stressed.

According to the politician, Mr. Rosenblum took note of calls for keeping the matter of the high-profile disappearances high on the US agenda.

Mr. Rosenblum said that the appointment of John Kerry as the United States` new secretary of state would not lead to sharp changes in the country`s policy toward Belarus. He denied speculation that Washington may agree to Moscow extending its sphere of influence to all ex-Soviet countries. He also said that a group of US analysts who met with Mr. Lukashenka in Minsk earlier this month had not had prior contacts with the US government and had traveled to Belarus on their own initiative.

"Rosenblum`s visit is evidence of the United States` interest in Belarus. It is good that an official at such a level is interested to learn about the situation in our country. There is an opportunity to ask direct questions and express your stance," Mr. Lyabedzka said.

Source: http://naviny.by, January 31, 2013

Uladzimir Baradac: Returning our People to Historical Values

Analyzing the activities of various oppositional political forces in Belarus is not likely to produce much optimism concerning their ability to win over the potential of protesting electorate. In his interview for the ***Belarusian Review*** *Uladzimir Baradac, chairman of the Organizing Committee of the "Council for National Revival," expresses* ***his own view*** *on the present situation in Belarus.*

Belarusian Review (BR): Is there in the present Belarus a realistic or potential alternative to Lukasenka and his political course?

Uladzimir Baradac (UB): An alternative to the dictator cannot exist in any country. It is prohibited. Any generally efficient director of a good enterprise might become an alternative to Lukasenka; however, he will be immediately robbed or jailed. Leaders of the opposition are managed by the regime, and are content only with whatever it allows them. Actually Europe is feeding the bogus opposition, and has completely wasted democratic processes in Belarus. There exist persons who are capable of getting the country rid of the dictatorship; however, to accomplish it, they lack necessary resources or interested allies. On the other hand, Lukasenka has a powerful strategic partner. The correlation of forces does not favor democracy. In the present situation Lukasenka may be replaced only by Russia. This is why now it makes no sense speaking about an alternative course.

BR: The readiness of Belarus' population to accept changes is rather substantial. Yet the present representatives of the opposition do not enjoy great support by the population. How would you explain such a situation?

UB: 65% of the people, including the administrative apparatus, do wish changes,. The potential is great. However, the discredited opposition is depriving people of hopes for changes; this impedes their activity and stifles their will. 70% of its leaders represent a harmful processed slag and are Lukasenka's servants. People do know and see it. In order to change the situation, the democratic forces must be restructured as soon as possible. We must create a single center of struggle, and build a system that is not controlled by the regime's special services. This is not a complicated task; yet the West should stake on us (regime's opponents) . We will produce a completely different result, form a respected team, and change the situation.

BR: How do you assess the "national revival?" On what values should it be based?

UB: For me it is very important to preserve Belarus' independence, to stop people's emigration abroad, to preserve our ethnos, to create conditions for Belarusians' return to their Homeland. Today we are not speaking anymore just about the development of national values: language, culture, traditions. What matters now is the nation's survival and returning our people to historical values and relics. The language is dying, and with it the Belarusian people. Citizens of other countries may establish permanent residence in our country; however, they should accept our way of life, and not impose on us their will and beliefs.

THOUGHTS & OBSERVATIONS

Belarus' abnormal bilingualism

By Hanna Vasilevich

While unveiling the commemorative plaque for Janka Kupala (People's Poet of Belarus) in the Latvian capital Riga on 14th of March, the Belarusian minister of culture, Barys Sviatlou, has underscored that Belarusian language does not face any problems in Belarus. He conceded that there might be some general issues concerning the language as the basis of national culture; according to him, however, no one is forbidden to publicly speak Belarusian in Minsk.

On one hand, such a statement is absolutely correct since the Constitution stipulates that the Belarusian language is one of the two official languages of the Republic of Belarus. The language is visible throughout the country through TV and radio broadcasts, public announcements and road signs, paper money and postal stamps, etc. The language is being taught in schools as a mandatory subject;

candidates for any position in the public service are required by law to possess the appropriate knowledge of Belarusian language. The official statistics prove that it is the mother tongue for the majority of country's population and is the primary language of communication for approximately a quarter of Belarusian citizens.

On the other hand, in the third-largest Belarusian city of Mahilioŭ with population of over 350,000, just one child is attending a Belarusian-language class – not even a full-fledged Belarusian school. More or less similar situation concerning the school education may be observed in nearly all major Belarusian cities. Such a situation has its roots in the country's legislation and practice - typical for major cities where **the instruction in Russian language is the default option** for school education. This implies that in order to send their child to a Belarusian-language kindergarten or school, parents have to submit a request to relevant education authorities. The procedure followed might be time-consuming and not always effective.

The recent example of the Belarusian sculptor Henik Lojka, who was sentenced for five days of imprisonment for his action designed to protect the Belarusian language, once again showed another problem – the country lacks Belarusian-language administrative, criminal, civil, commercial and procedural legislation. Such a situation considerably limits the capacities for using the Belarusian language in the judicial sphere.

Thus, the country faces a significant dilemma that has its roots in the official bilingualism with equal status of Belarusian and Russian languages. There exist spheres where the state has not provided adequate language facilities for speakers of Belarusian. The two examples above show that the spheres with insufficient Belarusian language facilities belong to the very important areas of life of the Belarusian society.

While proclaiming the equality of Belarusian and Russian languages as official languages of Belarus, the Belarusian constitution guarantees everyone "the right to use his native language and to choose the language of communication." At the same time nearly all specific laws concerning the usage of language refer to "Belarusian or Russian" or "one of official languages." This "either-or" model does not exclude Belarusian, but neither does it provides measures necessary for promoting the language, particularly in areas with insufficient language facilities. In other words, the "either-or" model does not do anything to change the existing status quo. The reluctance to change the current formulations of the specific laws to "both Belarusian and Russian" is often justified by the considerable increase of costs in the situation when the country cannot afford any additional expenditure.

But are the Belarusian authorities unfriendly to the titular language? And are the Belarusians reluctant to use it? In both cases the answer would be negative.

The authorities declare their support for the Belarusian language. However, when it comes to possible legislation changes in order to promote it, Belarusian public servants are faced with additional challenges. Since they belong to a conservative stratum, they would rather oppose radical changes that would require additional work for them and considerably change the long-established rules.

In its turn, the population largely respects the Belarusian language, but does not protest against the current language status quo. This may be due to the time-consuming and not always effective tools to change the situation. Moreover, the simple unwillingness to be involved into any kind of an apparent conflict seems to be the most convincing argument for the population's passivity in defending its language rights.

In this situation the promotion of the Belarusian language might be performed with both top-down (particularly in areas where the state declares its support for the national language) and bottom-up approaches (through civic initiatives). It is possible to assume that in case of positive development and promotion of the Belarusian language facilities changes in the country's linguistic situation might be expected in a mid-term perspective.

However, it seems that the most important step should be made by the state in changing its attitude concerning the language of instruction in primary and secondary schools, both in law and in practice. The current time-consuming and ineffective mechanism, when parents who want their children to be instructed in Belarusian language, need to make additional efforts to achieve their legitimate claims - without even an ultimate guarantee that their child would be able to study in Belarusian - should be changed. This also requires a change of attitude of local authorities concerning the wider promotion of Belarusian-language education, since the decisions to open or close schools and classes are usually made by local executive committees.

No Easy Way Forward

By Jan Maksymiuk

A personal note on Poland's Belarusian minority

According to the 2002 census in Poland, which inquired about ethnic afilliation and language spoken at home for the first time in post-war Poland, some 47,600 people declared their Belarusian ethnicity (narodowość białoruska). The overwhelming majority of Poland's Belarusians (97%) lived in 2002 in the Podlachian Province (województwo podlaskie), in the north-eastern part of the country.

Another census, held in Poland in 2011, attested that there were 47,000 Belarusians in the country. The drop in their number over the past nine years was rather insignificant and amounted to 1.2% nationwide. However, the number of Belarusians in their ethnic area, i.e. Podlachian Province, decreased by 17.4% – from 46,400 in 2002 to 38,300 in 2011.

The decline in the number of Belarusians in the Podlachian Province is especially puzzling if we take into account that the number of Ukrainians in the same region increased by 57% — from 1,400 in 2002 to 2,200 in 2011. What were

the reasons behind this dramatic Belarusian regression?

We cannot say that the Belarusian minority in Poland was discriminated by the central or local authorities when compared to how the authorities behaved toward other ethnic minorities in the country. On the contrary, it may be even argued that the Belarusian minority was supported by the Polish government to a greater extent that other minorities, owing to Warsaw's vigorous role in promoting democracy and human rights in Belarus under President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. The Belarusian-language Radio Racja in Bialystok and Belsat TV in Warsaw, financed mainly by the Polish government, are the most graphic examples of Poland's care about maintaining its Belarusian minority in a fairly good shape – an essential part of programming for Radio Racja and some programs for Belsat TV are made by ethnic Belarusian journalists in Bialystok.

There are also significant educational and publishing activities that serve the needs of Belarusians in Poland. According to official data, there are currently more than 3,000 students of Belarusian in some 40 primary and secondary schools in Podlachian Province. The regular circulation of the Belarusian-language weekly "Niva", which has been published with financial support from the Polish government since 1956, is 1,300 copies. In addition, Warsaw finances the publication of the bilingual monthly "Czasopis", which includes text in Polish and Belarusian and caters primarily to the Belarusian minority in Poland (the monthly circulation of "Czasopis" is 800 copies). Also, there are regular daily programs in Belarusian on local radio and a weekly program in Belarusian on local television in Bialystok (in addition to those on Radio Racja and Belast TV. All these could be quite impressive indicators of an animated ethnic life for a minority of 40,000 in any other country. But despite these formal indicators, the Belarusian minority in Poland's Podlachia Province is evidently waning. Why?

In my personal opinion, the answer to this perplexing dilemma lies in the language situation of Podlachian Belarusians.

In 2002 some 40,000 Belarusians in Poland declared that they spoke Belarusian at home. But an analysis of the regional distribution of data on the language spoken at home by Belarusians in Podlachian Province leads us to the conclusion that 69% of them used the term Belarusian to identify their Podlachian local dialects which, like Palessian dialects in Belarus's Brest Oblast, stand out as markedly different from the literary Belarusian and, in terms of their morphology and phonetics, are more akin to the Ukrainian literary standard.

In fact, the same in-depth analysis of the 2002 census data shows that just 17% of Belarusians in Podlachian Provinces speak Belarusian dialects at home; 14% speak Polish; and 69%, as noted above, speak Podlachian dialects.

I think the 2011 census data unambiguously show that the promotion of the Belarusian literary language alone in Podlachian Province is no longer helpful in mobilizing and supporting the Belarusian ethnic identity in the region. In order to stop or decelerate the downward demographic trend for Podlachian Belarusians, immediate measures should be taken by Belarusian ethnic activists and journalists to encourage the public use of Podlachian local dialects in speech and writing.

The need for such encouragement and promotion has been amply testified by the Facebook community "Howorymo po swojomu" (We speak our own language), which appeared in December 2012 and mustered more than 2,000 supporters to date. The "Howorymo po swojomu" community, which consists of primarily young people in the age range 18-25 years, is concerned about the preservation of Podlachian local dialects as an important part of the regional legacy of people born in Podlachian Province. What is no less important, the overwhelming majority of comments at the "Howorymo po swojomu" site is left in Latin script, often in an off-hand orthography. Cyrilic literacy among the youngergenerations of people born in Podlachian Province seems to be very weak or non-existent.

The idea to make Podlachian local dialects instrumental in promoting the Belarusian ethnic identity in Poland was first voiced by myself in 2005, shortly after the official data on the regional distribution of Belarusians in Podlachian Province were made public.Regrettably, no plans for this purpose have been worked out, let alone implemented, by Belarusian ethnic activists and journalists in Bialystok to date.

It is my deepest conviction that there is no other way for Poland's Belarusians to move forward as a distinct ethnic group than to elevate a more or less standardized version of Podlachian local dialects to the status of their full-fledged minority language, along with the standard Belarusian. It is no easy way to follow but the current road, which has been chosen by Poland's Belarusian some 60 years ago, does not seem to lead to any hopeful destination.

From Political Struggle to Civil Work: Belarusian Democratic Movement at the Moment

By Ilya Kunitski

It's a snowy night in Minsk in mid-February and I am walking and talking with Aleś Krot, one of the activists of the non-governmental organization *Student Council*. The situation looks pretty bleak from abroad, but I want his opinion on the current situation in the Belarusian democratic movement – the local activist view from within. He doesn't dissuade the obvious: "Not much is happening right now. It's quiet. The peak of activity is around presidential election time." And right now Belarus is in the middle of the election cycle.

Indeed, it is quiet on the Belarusian political scene. Quiet and gloomy: it's been two years since the active part of the cycle – last presidential elections – and since then the Belarusian regime has further tightened its grip on the opposition. The pro-freedom movement never recovered after the brutal post-elections crackdown when thousands of people were beaten, hundreds arrested and dozens imprisoned and tortured, including several presidential candidates. The economic woes of 2011 caused another wave of discontent in the form of notorious "silent protests," but authorities

quickly cracked down on them too by arresting hundreds. During the past two years a number of prominent prisoners were released, however, 11 political prisoners still remain in jail, according to Human Rights Center *Viasna*. Former presidential candidates Aleś Mihalevich and Andrei Sannikov, as well as several other journalists and activists, fled to the West after being released from jail. Everyone else who remains in Belarus is under a seemingly endless, around-the-clock KGB watch.

Meanwhile, there is not much pressure on the Belarusian regime from the outside. The European Union is still unsure how to deal with Lukashenka. Of course, there are travel and economic sanctions in place, but they are not very effective. For instance, former Interior Minister Anatol Kuliashou, who led a violent suppression of post-elections protests two years ago, is on the list of people who are banned from entering the European Union, yet he was able to travel to France for an Interpol meeting in January 2013. While it is true that the travel ban does not affect international organizations based in the Western countries, such as Interpol or the United Nations, it provides convenient propaganda material for the regime to feed to local population: look, there is a travel ban, but we can still go there.

Belarusian economy is not a source of instability either, at least not yet. European and the United States' sanctions notwithstanding, the Belarusian economy grew by 5.3% in 2011 and was expected to post 4.3% growth in 2012. The unemployment rate is low – it's surely higher than official 1% – but it remains low as many Belarusians go to work in Russia if they are unable to find employment at home. Of course, Russia is a crucial factor in Belarusian economic stability as it provides cheap oil and gas, money loans and jobs. It's the biggest trading partner of Belarus by far. In mid-March Lukashenka met with Vladimir Putin in Saint Petersburg to secure another cash loan, but negotiations have stalled. Inside Belarus, people do complain about the economy. For example, groceries prices are high and growing, while salaries are stagnant. However, the situation is not bad enough to spill on the streets in the form of protests.

Aleś Krot agrees with me, that Belarus' population's protest mood grows around the time of the presidential election when the people are fed up and ready to try and change something in their lives. Also, by then, the West tries to support and finance Belarusian opposition more actively. The next election is more than two years from today, so, for now almost every Belarusian political party and movement has moved from political activity to civil activity – one area where fear of repression is not that high. Of course, the government tries to meddle in civil and cultural affairs as well. For instance, there is an unofficial "black list" of musicians and artists, whose concerts and exhibitions are banned and whose songs are out of rotation on official radio stations. Human rights organizations are routinely harassed by the authorities. But, Belarusian activists bravely work in various areas like defending citizens' rights, promoting Belarusian culture and supporting Belarusian language. One good example of successful work done in the field is a cultural initiative called *Budzma*. It was started in 2008 and since then it has organized numerous concerts, exhibitions and events promoting the Belarusian language. *Budzma's* goal is to promote local culture and the feeling of unity among the Belarusians – key, foundational work which is needed to build a strong civil society.

Aleś Krot is one of the activists of *Student Council*, another non-political entity which tries to work with one of the most vulnerable groups of Belarusian population – students. The organization informs Belarusian students about their rights and helps to defend them through legal means. Despite his youth – only 23 years old – Aleś has a rich personal experience he can share with others: he has the life of a typical young Belarusian activist. Aleś has been arrested three times on charges that highlight the hypocrisy of the Belarusian judiciary system and its subordination to the regime. The first time he was arrested was in July 2011 during the aforementioned "silent protests" in Minsk for peaceful protesting against government policies which cost him two weeks in jail. The second time he was jailed on December 31, 2011, right before New Year's, the biggest holiday in Belarus, for swearing in public, according to the protocol of arrest. It is a common move for the police in Belarus to arrest anti-government activists for swearing with only members of the police being witnesses as to whether swearing actually happened. Aleś spent New Year's and the next two days behind bars waiting for courts to re-open after the holiday. At the court hearing, even a pro-government judge recognized the absurdity of the charges and later dismissed the case. The third time Aleś was detained was in November 2012 in the small town of Svisloch for honoring the legacy of Belarusian national hero Kastuś Kalinouski. This time, he spent three days in jail.

Besides being detained three times, he was also expelled from his university – the Belarusian National Technical University (BNTU) in the beginning of 2011, allegedly, for his civil activity. However, he was able to reinstate himself in the school through the court a couple of months later. It's hard to say why Belarusian authorities backtracked in this case as it was only the second time (the other one was Zmicer Zheliznichenka) someone was reinstated in the history of authoritarian Belarus, despite hundreds of students expelled. Now Aleś volunteers at *Student Council* and advises other students on how to fight for their rights peacefully. He showed that it can be done even through the government-controlled judicial system. But challenges remain, and authorities create different obstacles to prevent pro-democratic NGOs from functioning properly. For instance, Student Council was recently denied a space to hold a non-threatening celebration of International Students Day.

In general, non-political NGOs deserve more attention and support from the Western democracies. If Belarusian political opposition and parties receive somewhat sufficient degree of attention and funding, less known non-governmental organizations are often overlooked. But they do important, long-term work which will bear fruit in the future, so it is critical to support their efforts. It's a tough cause to be a democratic activist in Belarus, but while young people like Aleś continue their struggle, there is hope.

Minsk-Tbilisi: Reciprocal Diplomatic Assistance

By David Erkomaishvili

Belarus' foreign affairs chief Uladzimir Makei had taken part in the second foreign ministers' meeting of the informal Eastern Partnership dialogue in Tbilisi. The meeting, which among others bade welcome to high-level EU officials Štefan Füle, Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy, and Deputy Secretary General of the European External Action Service Helga Schmid, was intended to serve as one of preparatory moves ahead of the Eastern Partnership summit scheduled to take place in Vilnius in November of this year.

In the context of this summit, there have already been indications, voiced by senior foreign policy advisor to the president of Lithuania Jovita Neliupšienė in a statement on 18 January, that Lithuania may not invite Belarus government representatives. Taking into account the level of anxiety that is steadily maintained in relations between EU and Belarus, not to mention travel restrictions extended to Belarus officials, the choice of place for holding informal dialogues does not seem odd. Tbilisi has become a neutral ground and a compromise in this case. On the one hand, using one of the Eastern Partnership capitals allows EU to maintain its formal soft boycott stance on Belarus. On the other, holding the meeting outside the EU territory offered Brussels yet another solution to the practical problem of engaging Minsk within the Eastern Partnership, while saving its face.

Meanwhile Georgia has been actively involved in lobbying Belarus' interests in the framework. To be sure, Minsk has a lot of other instruments and contacts in its dialogue with Brussels to take care of itself. However, there is a clear and consistent policy observed in which Tbilisi has been tacitly promoting Belarus interests within the Eastern Partnership initiative.

Indirectly such stance had been reflected in a dialogue, which took place in a meeting between Uladzimir Makei and Mikheil Saakashvili, right after the wrap-up of negotiations in Tbilisi. In a brief discussion, Makei displayed his gratitude for all Georgian leader's efforts in promoting Belarus' position in the Eastern Partnership, including creating opportunities for such meetings. Makei is one of the 243 Belarus officials banned from entering EU as part of the sanctions package. Georgian president in his turn accentuated his appreciation for Belarus for all 'what it has done for us.' That is of course a reference to the Minsk non-recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. Curiously, Tbilisi's reasonably successful cooperation with Minsk in the last two years progressed without formal siding with Belarus.

Situation in Georgia

After the parliamentary elections in Georgia certain changes have followed - concerning domestic but in no lesser respect foreign policies. Mikheil Saakashvili conceded most of his powers to prime minister Bidzina Ivanishvili and will do so even more later on, once the constitutional amendments enter into force.

The obvious confrontation between the prime minister and the president spill over into all areas of public sphere including foreign policy. While Saakashvili's foreign policy has been firmly aligned to the West, Ivanishvili's approach is different. As his initial goal, the prime minister has defined as one of the key priorities of his government, was restoring relations with Moscow. There is a reason for it. During the electoral campaign Ivanishvili pledged to make all efforts in reforming what Saakashvili's team has largely failed to reform – agriculture. Now most of his electorate expect him to do just that. This goal envisages opening up the Russian market for Georgian agriculture products. For that Ivanishvili will need to reinstate economic if not political ties with Moscow. The price set by the Kremlin s is well-known. But even under the best conditions opening the market will hardly exceed additional 80 million US dollars revenue for the Georgian budget. It is not a big profit even for the country oft the size of Georgia. Opposition, which Mikheil Saakashvili now represents, is afraid that the price will require giving up the western-oriented foreign policy.

Domestically the ruling Georgian Dream coalition is trying to do all it can to brake the fragile democratic balance that has resulted after the parliamentary elections and take away remaining powers from the president. This destabilises the country. At the same time, the coalition itself is very loose, since it unites different parties under one banner. While Ivanishvili has been vocally supportive of the foreign policy of westernisation, he was also willing to weaken the role of Irakli Alasania, the head of Free Democrats party and Minister of Defence, perhaps the key westerniser in his government, by stripping him of vice premiership. This of course creates numerous options for unconventional alignments among actors on Georgian political scene later this year, as the country approaches presidential elections and fully embraces the parliamentary system of government.

What it Does it Mean for Belarus-Georgia Relations?

Aliaksandr Lukashenka has been making the point that his personal task in 2013, the year Belarus takes over chairmanship of the CIS, will be to 'act in every possible way' to initiate Georgia's return to the CIS. Moscow has signalled that it will not be objecting to such move. Uladzimir Makei told Saakashvili that Lukashenka wants to meet him personally and that most probably means the visit of Belarus' leader to Georgia. This is already the second public indication of a possibility of such visit. At the end of January Lukashenka said that he intends to visit Tbilisi on the invitation of Georgian leader and discuss the CIS matter with the government.

Meanwhile responding to this initiative, one of the leaders of Republican Party, which is a member of Georgian Dream ruling coalition, Levan Berdzenishvili warned Lukashenka against visiting Georgia and accused Belarus authorities of carrying out politically motivated prosecutions.

This may well be a signal from the coalition to the leader of Belarus regarding what side he should make his bet on. So far, the benefits of visibly warming relations between Minsk and Tbilisi have been political in nature and have not resulted in stimulating firm contacts in the long run, which would involve higher levels of alignment including economic, cultural and civil society links. Current cooperation is tactical and does not hold yet any strategic element in it.

One question has been hunting many : why has Lukashenka actively embarked on lobbying for Georgian return to the CIS? So far, Georgia's foreign policy has not been leaving any space for the CIS, as the ruling coalition has brushed aside any attempt to bring up the CIS question. Nevertheless, in the light of ongoing fierce struggle for power inside the Georgian establishment, the formal change of the foreign policy course in Tbilisi may not be a matter of distant future. Obviously the current cabinet as well as the composition of the parliament is temporary (for Ivanishvili) and the nearest future may hold notable changes.

The Belarus' CIS policy becomes clearer if several factors are taken into account. At the end of January, Russia has tried to pore over the position of Georgia's government. The head of the CIS countries, representing the First Department of the Russian foreign ministry, Mikhail Evdokimov voiced an opinion that Georgia can return its CIS membership speculating that the contacts with Georgian government are being already maintained on this issue. Evdokimov's offer has sounded from Minsk, the capital of the CIS. Sergei Lebedev, the CIS Executive Secretary, has echoed at the same time that the organisation preserves an open doors policy for Georgia. In Tbilisi such offers have caused Ivanishvili's key ministers to hurry and refute that there are any negotiations on the CIS matter.

In the meantime, returning CIS membership is the most painless step Tbilisi can undertake to assure Russia of its intentions, since the CIS is a barely influential organisation. There are two sides to the idea of getting Georgia back to CIS. First, after announcing its decision to quit the bloc in 2008 Tbilisi had spent more than a year renegotiating all multilateral agreements, including the ones covering culture, transport, education, visa-free issues which had been signed in the CIS framework, to bilateral level. Reentering CIS will render that hard work obsolete. Second, Tbilisi will have little practical benefit from membership, other than formally signifying the turn in its foreign policy.

The Lukashenka initiative was best spelled out by Belarus' deputy foreign minister Aliaksandr Mikhnevich who referred to it saying that 'The President had an initiative regarding cooperation with Georgia in order not to deprive this country of contacts with the CIS.' In other words, it is rather a declaration that the leader of Belarus will help promote Georgia's interests in the CIS area. When it comes to restoring relations with Russia, hardly anyone else is better positioned than Lukashenka to lobby for that. As the key Russian ally in the post-Soviet space Belarus participates in all flagship integrative frameworks in the status of co-founder together with Russia. Not to mention he has acquired tremendous credibility in Georgia for not giving in to Russian arm-twisting on the issue of breakaway territories. Thus, Lukashenka's offer is an attempt to help Georgia maintain its interests in the process of restoring relations with Russia.

A Little Story about my Life or Why I Write about Belarus

Ángela Espinosa Ruiz

As a humble twenty-year-old philology student, I was elated when I was first invited to write news digests for the *Belarusian Review* last September; this was, from my point of view, a great honour of which I did not feel truly worthy. Needless to say, I was excited to have been requested to write a full-length article about Belarus to be published in the 25th anniversary issue of this very periodical. It was a dream come true, nearly impossible for someone like me or, at least, that is how I would have seen it earlier in my life.

In any case, it seemed that my life had been starting to get more and more interesting at a vertiginous pace –a progression that started some years before I was awarded the *Belarus in Focus* prize that brought me here in the first place, but that had been noticeably accelerated by this fact– and I must admit that I have sometimes doubted my capacity to keep up with my newly found identity as an international being, a college student, a friend to many more than expected and a political activist. I am doing my best, as, I hope, you will guess from my writing, and I shall ask you to forgive me if this tale bores you. This would be merely a fault of my prose, not of the facts I'll describe, as it could not have been more exciting for me.

Back to my article –this article!–, I spent many a sleepless night pondering my possibilities and trying to figure out what would be best to write; I considered putting together a study about the written Belarusian language and its two alphabets (I'll eventually get down to work here, as it is a subject of capital importance and I feel that I should devote it much more time than I had to come up with this, as a future philologist), or something concerning alternative Belarusian culture. In the end, though, it occurred to me that it was high time I answered a question I've been asked many times: *how much do you know about Belarus, and, why do you care?*

The question stated in the paragraph above may very well sound odd to you, my readers. How does someone *not* know about Belarus? In fact, some of you will probably see a logical explanation to this first part of the question, especially if you live abroad, within a community of non-Belarusians/non-Slavicists/non-Eastern-Europe-Politologists; in other words, among regular people. Where I come from, in Southern Europe, most people aren't even able to locate Belarus on a world map, and some people are not even aware of the existence of such a country. I have to admit to have lived in – almost total – ignorance, just like the rest, for about 15 years of my life before I first heard about

Belarus outside of my geography textbook (yes, I knew where it was on the map, but that was about it). Still, the point that worries me the most about this all is the second part of the question: *why do you care?* Once you find out about Belarus, how can you possibly *not* care? Imagine you discover one of the most bubbling cultures in Europe, right between the influences of the East and the West, of Rome and Byzantium, with one of the most melodious languages heard in the history of Linguistics and, sadly, under one of the worst tyrannical governments in the world - and it leaves you indifferent. I wish I could understand how this can ever happen, but I do not know the answer to this. It is one of the facts that bother me most, as I feel that, for example, this page you are holding right now will be good for curing ignorance about Belarus to a certain degree, but I can never be sure that it will also be useful against apathy. I suppose it is something I cannot really control. But I do need to try, at least, and so I will get to the point:

Mine was one funny case. Aged 13, I found out my school was becoming bilingual, but I was one year too old to get into the English programme, and, even though one could say I knew my grammar all right, I was absolutely at a loss if I had to actually communicate with other speakers, write a coherent text or make out what I heard in English. To make a long story short, I basically learnt English out of spite. I would watch films in English, listen to Celtic music and… No, forget it, my language-learning techniques are secret and completely irrelevant to what I'm trying to share, so I'll stop right there. Thanks to my newly-acquired command of the tongue of Shakespeare –and my *joie de vivre* and enthusiasm over other cultures, I've been told–, at the age of 15, in 2008, I was chosen to participate on the Benjamin Franklin Transatlantic Fellows Initiative, a programme organised by the US Department of States that gathered young people from Europe, Eurasia and different parts of the USA to develop their leadership qualities. We spent three and a half weeks on the Wake Forest (North Carolina) campus, plus a short trip to Washington, D. C. and Philadelphia; a follow-up reunion was held the following year in Blagoevgrad (Bulgaria). These two periods I count among the best and most interesting I've ever gone through. To top it off, the best part about it is the fact that the influence BFTF had on my life still remains, especially through the unforgettable friends I made there. And yes, you have guessed it; this was my first direct contact with Belarus.

When I got to America, I met one to four representatives per country, excluding the US, and saw that I was the only Spaniard invited to the party. This did not bother me at all; I was a bright-eyed 15-year-old with a *tabula rasa* for the mind –which is, by the way, still pretty empty– and I couldn't have been more excited to meet people different from what I was used to dealing with (you must have guessed by now that I was quite a nerdish high-schooler, right?). I found myself trying to hastily memorise all the names, sites and historical facts that my peers brought up in discussion –don't blame me, but the Spanish education system!– so that I would not look utterly stupid to my new friends, and I couldn't help noticing the Russian language.

We had representatives from countries like Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, and those ending in –istan (for example, Uzbekistan), and they would sometimes use Russian as a bridge tongue, even if every language except for English was "banned" from the programme, for obvious reasons. I am very glad that they broke this rule, though, as it was crucial for my later interest in Slavistics, my current specialisation field. I fell in love with its rhythm, its cadence, its musicality and, eventually, its people, too; the people with whom I identified it, that is, my dear friends. I was fascinated by Russian to a point where I would approach a Russian-speaking group and, after they had noticed me and switched to English, I would beg them to continue speaking Russian so that I could listen in. Of course, they did think I was a geek, but so were they, and they grew fond of me, to my delight. I started studying Russian seriously two years after the programme itself took place, in September 2009, and I started my college degree (Slavic Philology with Russian and Polish as my main languages) in 2011. Obviously, my learning of the language was accompanied by an immersion into the culture, literature, customs and politics of Slavic countries, thanks to my lovely friends and my strong personal interest on those matters.

As for Belarus itself, I must say I was very pleasantly surprised when I realised the Belarusians I'd met during my time in the United States and Bulgaria — and, later on, Poland — were, in fact, some of the most intelligent, well-mannered and educated people I had ever stumbled upon. All of them spoke more than two languages, which seemed very impressive at the time; many played musical instruments, and they were all extremely kind, open and willing to listen to your stories as well as explaining their own in the simplest way possible for us outsiders to understand. I can't help but recall some of the first conversations about the subject I had with one of my dear Belarusian friends, "we're not democratic like Spain", he would say, "but the people in Belarus are very tolerant and open, and I feel that's the first step towards a fair government". I later found out that he was very interested in Spanish history, culture and language, and that one of his heroes was Adolfo Suárez, the main promoter, along with the Crown, of the present Spanish system, breaking free from Franco's 40-year Fascist dictatorship. I probably heard the Belarusian language for the first time during one of those chats, and immediately fell in love with its own particular music.

Having friends from so many different and distant places, naturally, makes you grow as an individual, and it has been very enriching for me, too. On the other hand, there is a darker side to this reality that not many think about –luckily enough–, but that has affected me, too, forcing me to face problems I could have never imagined. Each country constitutes a tiny world of its own, with customs, rules and problems that make it unique. Comforting a friend who has lost most of her male loved ones in battle, having to stay out of touch with another because of a civil war in her country, or facing a friend's death for reasons you cannot fully understand is not easy, and I talk from experience. I want to make clear that the fret and the fear does not in

any case get close to how satisfying it is to have such a loyal, loving and varied circle of friends as mine.

Concerning this little-known problem, I cannot finish without mentioning that the 2010 Presidential Elections were a real point of inflection for my personal development. I was seventeen going on eighteen at the time, and I could not –and would not– believe my eyes when I first saw the images of corruption during the election itself, despair and violence during the protests shortly after and defeat in the blood that stained the freshly fallen snow red. The election wasn't widely covered by Spanish media, unsurprisingly, but I still dared not look at the television right in front of me for fear of spotting one of my friends being hurt, as unlikely as that may be. I soon realised that I needed to come to my senses and keep a cool head, as the friends I loved so much were bond to need my help and support, whatever their situation was. I gathered all the information I could from international media and, at the same time, I looked for my friends online. One by one, I found them between that very night and the following morning; none of them had been harmed during the riots, but they were very discouraged indeed, and afraid. I can't say I don't understand why.

This is how I finally became an adult, with everything it implies. I would get up at nine o'clock, gobble down some breakfast, if I found the strength to, and go over to my laptop to try and do something for them, for Belarus. When I had time, I reflected upon the times when *Belarus* was just the name of a random, faraway country that I had heard during a geography lesson and that meant nothing to me, and it dawned on me that most people in Spain, and probably in Western Europe, were in the same situation as I was. How could they not care for such kind-hearted people as my friends? How could they not see that Belarus has borders with the EU and that we do virtually nothing for our neighbours? How can this situation be seen as normal or, worse, go completely unseen? I had realised that this could not go on any longer; at least, not if I had anything to do with it. My mind was set to act, and my stubborn conscience was determined not to give up, whatever should happen.

One day, after twelve hours on the computer with a friend, engaged in a heart-to-heart conversation, I felt that I would collapse. I excused myself, took a notebook and a pen and locked myself in the bathroom without a word to my family. "All right", I thought, "either I start crying hysterically, or I start writing hysterically". I went for the writing, and that made a great difference, I daresay. I wrote *Spain-Belarus: Contrast of Concerns*.

I wasn't fully aware of it at that very moment, while my hand dashed through the paper staining my fingers with blue ink that ran like blood in my secret frenzy, but I wanted to make people like me realise that the Belarusians I loved could be their own friends, lovers or family members. I wanted to make them see how ugly things can get behind a mere political border. But I also wanted to introduce them to Belarusian sewing patterns, and the poetry of Janka Kupala and Jakub Kolas, and the philosophy of Skaryna, and the marvels of the Belarus Free Theatre, and the songs of Uladzimir Niakliajeu, and the soul of *Paulinka* in Siberia, and all the little miracles my friends had told me about with starry eyes and hopeful hearts, full of love for their homeland. This is why I write about Belarus.

BELARUS ABROAD

Exhibition about BNR was not Allowed in Minsk

An exhibition "Unknown Belarusian People's Republic"(also known as BNR) was opened in the premises of the National Library in Prague.

The small room of the Slavic library could not accommodate all the visitors of the exhibition's opening. Around a hundred people came and some of them had to listen to the opening speeches in the lobby, Radio Svaboda reports.

The first speech was made by the director of the Slavic library, which is a part of the National Library of Czech Republic. After his speech Lukáš Babka gave the floor to a EHU representative Jury Bačyšča.

Bachishcha told about the historic connections between Czech Republic and Belarus, starting with St. Hieronymus of Prague, who carried the word of God to the Belarusian lands, and later about the help of the knights in the fight of the Czech people against the crusaders. As Bačyšča said, it was "the fight for religious freedom, which was the foundation of any freedom". Later these connections continued with the activities of Francysk Skaryna, who published the first Belarusian translation of the Bible in Prague. The connections went through centuries to the times of the BNR, which was supported by young Czechoslovak Republic. And they proceed till nowadays, when the government of Czech Republic supports the fight of Belarusian people for freedom and democracy.

Among the exhibits there are pictures of formerly unknown documents of Ivan and Anton Luckievič. Also there is a letter of Jazep Drazdovič to the Vilnia Belarusian museum of Ivan Luckievič with the offer to buy his creations. The letter dates back to 22 April 1932. The exhibition has the materials of the Belarusian School Society and also the documents about the Belarusian military affairs of 1918-1920. The exhibition has been created by the BNR Rada's member Jury Yurkievič.

The organizers of the exhibition tried to bring it to Minsk as well. And according to them, a part of the exhibits – the copies of historic documents on posters – was detained at the Lithuanian-Belarusian border and these exhibits were not let in Belarus with the explanation that they were not properly registered.

The first secretary of Belarus' embassy in Prague Valiancin Spak was present at the exhibition's opening. Answering the question of whether the exhibition had chances of making it to Minsk, he said that there are always chances. But to the question why the exhibits were

not let in Belarus he said that that was apparently a purely technical problem and the organizers did not fill in the documents correctly.

Source: Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, February 2, 2013

Shocking Murder In Vilnia

*—Vilnia (officially **Vilnius** in Lithuanian) - March 6, 2013.*

On this day Raman Vajnicki, one of the leaders of the Belarusian community in Lithuania, was brutally murdered. His wife found his body in the basement of their house - gagged and with his hands tied. Traces of torture were found on his body.

Mr. Vajnicki was one of the initiators and creators of the Belarusian-language Francis Skaryna lyceum in the City of Vilnia. He was the school's deputy director in charge of economic affairs. In 2009 he was elected president of Belarusian organizations in Lithuania; he also represented the Belarusian minority in Lithuania's parliament.

Concerning his political views, Mr. Vajnicki was less critical of the current Belarusian regime than most of his compatriots in Lithuania. Speaking in the name of the Belarusian minority, he opposed the introduction of economic sanctions aganst Belarus' industrial concerns, such as *Belaruskali*.. He argued that they would hurt not only Belarus, but Lithuanians as well , since 80% of Belarusian products are shipped abroad via Lithuanian seaports.

Despite these differences, Mr. Vajnicki and his group have always participated in important Belarusian events such as the annual 25th of March (Day of Freedom) celebrations - under the national white-red-white flag.

Mr. Vajnicki was a native of Višnieva near Valožyn in Western Belarus. This town is also the birthplace of Shimon Peres, the current president of Israel.

The motive for this brutal act remains unclear. Some members of the Lithuanian parliament suspect the Russian secret services. Mr. Vajnicki has opposed Russian efforts to unite Lithuania's minorities against Lithuanian national and cultural policies.



Raman Vajnick

Giving Voice: Center for Belarusian Studies White Paper Series

The Center for Belarusian Studies is pleased to announce a new initiative for 2013. In light of the increased censorship of those engaged in commenting about the status of civil society in Belarus, whether in higher education or in the media, the Center of Belarusian Studies would like to provide a location for the expression and the exchange of ideas as a way to encourage the presence of so many important voices in the public sphere. The Center invites submissions for publication on its website on topics relevant to the contemporary issues and past experiences that affect Belarus.

Papers of no more than 1000 words will be considered for publication according to the following process:

1. submission of a proposed topic to our editorial staff;
2. upon approval, submission of the completed article in Belarusian;
3. completion of editorial process (for clarity not content)
4. translation by Center staff into English
5. Publication on the CBS.org site

Authors will be compensated at $50.00 USD per 250 words of text. Payment will be made upon receipt of the completed approved manuscript.

Authors retain copyright of their texts but will allow the CBS the right to publish their article in hard copy in a future publication.

The Center plans on publishing an average of two articles per month.

Proposals should be sent to Dr. M. Paula Survilla, Executive Director of the Center at **maria.survilla@wartburg.edu.**

Summer Language Institute 2013

Dr. Maria Paula Survilla, Executive Director of the Center for Belarusian Studies at Southwestern College (Winfield, KS) invites undergraduate and graduate students to participate in the Center's 3rd International Summer School of Belarusian Studies from **July 7 to August 4, 2013**.

The program, co-sponsored by the **Belarusian Historical Society** (Bialystok, Poland), will be held at the Belarusian Cultural Center and Belarusian Lyceum in the town of **Hajnowka**, located in the Podlasie region of northeastern Poland, an area of great natural beauty and home to Poland's large ethnic Belarusian population—an ideal setting for the study of Belarusian language, history, society, and culture, as well as for the study of a broad range of issues relating to cultural diversity and minorities policies in the EU. **Ambassador (retired) David H. Swartz** will serve as the summer school's Program Director. **Amb. Swartz** was the first U.S. ambassador to Belarus. His career also included service as Dean of the School of Language Studies at the U. S. Department of State.

Contacts

For further information and application materials, please visit the CBS website (http://belarusiancenter.org) or contact the Program Director, Amb. David Swartz (david.swartz@sckans.edu) and/or Associate Program Director, Dr. Curt Woolhiser (Brandeis University): cwoolhis@brandeis.edu. Please note that the deadline for all applications is March 1, 2013.

Day of Freedom : Worldwide Observances

Minsk

Several hundred opposition activists marched in Minsk amid a heavy police presence to mark the Day of Freedom. The event commemorates the 95th anniversary of the establishment of an independent state of Belarus on March 25, 1918.

The rally was organized by several opposition groups, including the Movement for Freedom, the United Citizens Party, and the Belarus Popular Front. Protesters carried historical white-red-white Belarusian flags, banned after a referendum in 1995 that allowed authorities to create new national symbols, including a new flag.

Some protesters carried portraits of political prisoners and demanded their release from prison. Belarusian authorities permitted the rally, but not the display of the historical Belarusian flag. RFE/RL's Belarus Service reports that at least eight activists were arrested.

Source: *RFE/RL*

Warsaw

The action dedicated to the 95th anniversary of the Belarusian Democratic Republic was held in Warsaw and gathered more than 60 participants. The demonstrators walked through Warsaw's center from Square of Three Crosses via the main tourist street Nowy Swiat. During the procession, they were shouting "To your and our freedom!", "Long Live Belarus!" and distributing to passers-by. leaflets containing information about the political situation in Belarus The manifestation continued on Castle Square where the rally was held. The Coordinator of European Belarus and director of the Belarusian House in Warsaw **Dzmitry Barodka**, the leader of the Conservative Christian party of the Belarusian People's Front **Zianon Pazniak** and editor-in-chief of the web site *charter97.org* **Natallia Radzina** spoke at the rally.

The leader of the Conservative Christian party of the Belarusian People's Front **Zianon Pazniak** urged Belarusians to unite around the national idea.

"The Day of Freedom is important for Belarusians because this date has become a sacred symbol of our nation. This symbol is consolidating, no matter what our political views may be. Researchers name many reasons why the Belarusian Democratic Republic didn't last at that time. I don't emphasize these objective reasons, but what is crucial is the deed that made it possible to declare the independence of the Belarusian People's Republic, to open the door to the future. Because — had the Belarusian People's Republic not been declared, we would not be independent today.

It was the first step, it was a program for the future fight, and 73 years later it was fulfilled. Today there is an independent state, independent to a certain extent, no matter what powers rule there. It is important to focus on the positive aspects, on the positive role that March 25 has played in history. There are several key factors that led to the victory. First of all, there should be a national idea that would consolidate the entire society. There was such an idea. Second of all, there should be an organization that would fulfill the national idea. There was such an organization – the Belarusian Socialist Hramada, and other institutions that worked together around the idea. The third key factor is the international solidarity, a wave of struggle of different nations for one idea.

Why is it so hard today? Why have all our attempts to get rid of this idiot schizophrenic regime failed during nearly 20 years, although we are much stronger, politically and in terms of our knowledge of history? Because we were left alone. That process, that common wave is over. All countries have moved forward. They are members of the European Union today. Our struggle is very time-consuming, but eventually it will result in victory. We should be patient, we should stay strong and remember the people who 95 years ago in very hard conditions raised this flag, and it was the flag of victory. This is the basis for us to consolidate around. No matter what political arguments we have, there is a situation when we all should be together. The Day of Freedom consolidates everyone. And let it be celebration of our consolidation," stated Zianon Pazniak

The manifestation was organized by the civil campaign European Belarus and the Belarusian House in Warsaw.

Source: *Charter97*

Prague

A few dozens Belarusians gathered at the *Olšany* cemetery in Prague to commemorate the first president of the BNR Piotra Krečeŭski (1879-1928), his successor Vasil Zacharka (1877-1943), and the Belarusian singer Michal Zabejda-Sumicki (1900-1981), who have been buried here.

The celebration continued with a solemn meeting dedicated to the Day of Freedom. Short speeches were delivered by the chairman of BNR Ivonka Survilla, member of the BNR Rada Siarhiej Navumčyk and two prominent figures of the national revival in 1980-90s in Belarus – Uladzimir Arloŭ and Vincuk Viačorka. Another speech was delivered by Uladzimir Baradač, one of the founders of the *Belarusian Union of Military Personnel.*

The obervance of the Day of Freedom in Prague ended with the inauguration of the new premises of the Belarusian Clubhouse, run by the public association "Pahonia" (address: ul. 5. května 1043/32). About a hundred people, including many children came to celebrate this event. In this friendly atmosphere Ivonka Survilla, Siarhiej Navumčyk, Uladzimir Arloŭ, Vincuk Viačorka and Uladzimir Baradač solemnly cut the white-red-white ribbon, thus opening the Belarusian Clubhouse in Prague. According to overall estimates, this was the most intense and crowded celebration of the Day of Freedom in Prague in last ten years.



Cutting the opening ribbon

The celebration has been organized by public associations "Skaryna" and "Pahonia".

Source: *RFE/RL and own information*

New York

More than 60 people took part in the celebration of the 95th anniversary of the proclamation of the independence of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, which was organized by the Belarusian-American Association (BAZA) and the parish of St. Cyril of Turaŭ in the New York borough of Brooklyn.

The celebrations were marked with greetings from the President of the Council of the Belarusian Democratic Republic Ivonka Survilla, World *Association* of *Belarusians* "Baćkaŭščyna", Belarusian Language Society, leader of the "For Freedom" Aliaksandr Milinkievič and other 17 Belarusian organizations from around the globe. The current Chairman of BAZA, Hanna Surmač, and two former leaders of the organization Anton Šukielojć and Viačka Stankievič delivered speeches. The official part was followed by a concert.

Source: *RFE/RL*

MEDIA WATCH

New Books

King Stakh's Wild Hunt By Uladzimir Karatkevich In English

Glagoslav Publications is pleased to bring to your attention a special title, Belarusian cultural heritage, historical mystery with gothic elements *King Stakh's Wild Hunt* by Uladzimir Karatkevich, published in English by Glagoslav Publications.

A mysterious country in the geographical centre of Europe, the one that author Uladzimir Karatkevich romantically placed 'under the white wings', Belarus today is still hidden from a larger public view. Glagoslav Publications is to present to the English speaking reader a gothic novel King Stakh's Wild Hunt that will tell the story of this land as once seen by its most acclaimed writer and historian.

King Stakh's Wild Hunt tells the tale of Andrej Bielarecki, a young folklorist who finds himself stranded by a storm in the castle of Marsh Firs, the seat of the fading aristocratic Janouski family. Offered refuge by Nadzieja, the last in the Janouskis' line, he learns of the family curse and terrible apparitions that portend her early death and trap her in permanent, maddening fear. As Bielarecki begins to unravel the secrets of the Janouskis, he himself becomes quarry of the Wild Hunt, silent phantoms who stalk the marshes on horseback and deliver death to all who cross their path. He must uncover the truth behind the ghostly hunt to release Nadzieja from her fate and undo the curse that hangs over the marshes.

A jewel of Belarusian classic literature, King Stakh's Wild Hunt is one of Karatkevich's most critically acclaimed works that also inspired a 1979 film adaptation. Based on an ancient European legend, this suspense masterpiece taps into the imagery of the country's rich cultural heritage to offer both a haunting piece of gothic intrigue as well as a profound meditation on the destiny of the Belarusian people. The canvas of this gothic story includes a personal theme of the author's sad concern for his nation's destiny. The search for the truth that unites the novella's characters is in fact the author's contemplation - which he passes on to the reader - of the society in the late XIXth century, its conditions and its prospects for the future.

An award-winning writer, journalist, screenwriter, professional linguist and passionate archaeologist and historian, recognised as having conceived the Belarusian historical novel, Uladzimir Karatkevich (1930-1984) excelled in converting the rich history of Belarus into works of fiction. A renowned figure at his peak between the late 1960s and early 1980s, Uladzimir Karatkevich continues to be regarded as one of the greatest representatives of his country's

literary tradition. His legacy counts in numerous essays, articles, plays and film scripts.

King Stakh's Wild Hunt was released in December 2012 by Glagoslav Publications, the only publishing house specializing in publication and worldwide distribution of English translations of Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian literature to promote culture of the Slavic countries to the Western world and provide the base for better understanding between the Slavs and the West.

"LIVING WITH A SCENT OF DANGER

European Adventures at the Fall of Communism"

A memoir by Joanne Ivy Stankievich

Being bugged by Communist secret police on a trip behind the Iron Curtain and later living through the corrupt chaos of post-Communist Prague: these were but two of the many adventures Joanne recounts in this memoir.

It covers the years 1988 - 2001 when she and her husband Walter (Viachka) lived in Munich, Prague and Florence.

His work, related to his homeland of Belarus, included eight years as Director of the Belarus Service for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty: while she searched for her own niche by developing a business in Italy, experiencing cultural differences, some humorous, some potentially dangerous.

Readers of the book will better understand the damage of years of repressive Communist rule and become aware that a declaration of independence unfortunately did not equate to western-style freedoms for Belarusians.

Excerpts from some reviews:

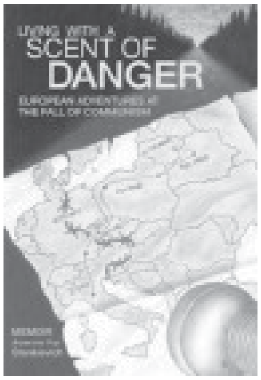
-- This book is a living history...you are in for quite a ride. Fasten your seatbelts. A.L.

-- Your memoir captures perfectly...in overall spirit, the period of time. J.O.

-- Great insight to a critical time in history from a family, business and political perspective. An enjoyable read. P.M.

www.JoanneIvyStankievich.com

www.amazon.com/Living-Scent-Danger-Adventures-Communism/dp/1432775863



ECONOMY

Belarus' Economy in 2013: Forward to the Past

On February 21st forecast data about socio-economic development in 2013 was published.

The 2013 projected data demonstrates the return of the economy to the 2010-2011 standards. The economic model will not change – the government is only choosing sources of funding to support the status quo. The period until the next devaluation will last as long as the government is able to find the required amount to keep the situation as is.

The Economy Ministry Regulation No 1, dated January 4th, 2013 and published only in the second half of February states, that the Belarus' current account balance in 2013 is projected with deficit minus USD 5.123 billion. In 2010, the balance was negative – minus USD 8.28 billion, in 2011 – minus USD 5.121 billion. In 2013 Belarus will benefit from gas supplies at discount prices – USD 2 billion, if compared with 2011. Excluding the possible continuation of the potential diesel fuel imports for the biodiesel production and potential benefits from the agreement on the duties' distribution, the picture resembles that of 2010.

The improvements in 2012 were temporary and mainly due to additional financial benefits from Russian oil re-export schemes. Scheme's suspension has triggered a chain reaction in the economy, which resulted in a drop in industrial production. The foreign trade balance was therefore negative and the financial economic outputs had deteriorated. Distorted perception of the real situation in the economy was due to savings of USD 2000 million to pay for the natural gas supply. The economic recovery was a misconception and some mistakes were repeated, which resulted in the devaluation in 2011.

Devaluation effect ceased to have impact in the second half of 2012. Wage growth has exceeded the nominal value compared with December 2010. The sale of Beltransgaz and oil re-export schemes increased the gold reserves to a relatively safe level (2 months worth of imports of goods and services). However, there were no significant structural changes. The main exports are petroleum products; Belarus' dependence on its main market - the Russian Federation, has increased; privatization efforts have been halted, the modernization de facto looks like the distribution of funds with minimal economic impact; private business operate primarily to maximize their profits due to potential sudden change in the business conditions, including the assets' nationalization.

Thus, the economic cycle in Belarus has looped. The period until the next devaluation will last as long as the government is able to find the required amount to keep the situation as is. The government considers sales of certain assets as a last resort option. The economic model will not change – the government is only choosing sources of funding to support the status quo.

Source: Solidarity with Belarus Information Office, March 5, 2013.

2.5 Million Working-age Belarusians Unemployed in Country's Economy

Belarusians flee abroad en masse.

From 100,000 to 1,000,000 Belarusians work outside the country, various estimates show. Most of them left the country because they cannot have a decent life in Belarus. How does it threat to the Belarusian economy? How does it influence the employment market?

According to the data of the Interior Ministry, 5,779 people left Belarus to work abroad under employment agreements since January to September 2012 (4,565 people YOY), *Belorusskie Novosti* reports.

It can be said with certainty that the official data do not reflect the reality: only a small part of migrant workers register themselves officially.

The research "Influence of Migration Flows on Socioeconomic Indexes of the Country: Belarusian Experience" by the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, indicated that the outflow of migrant workers from Belarus is 30 times higher the official labour migration and can be estimated at 150,000 people per year.

According to the official data and expert estimates, 85-90% of migrant workers choose Russia. This country is preferred by people from small and medium towns, while Minsk dwellers go to western countries.

The greater part of migrant workers are young people from 25 to 35 years old.

Natallya Zhak, a representative of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Belarus, the number of working-age Belarusians abroad is from 800,000 to 1,200,000 people. "It does not mean they left the country forever and will not return there," the expert notes. "They go abroad, return, go to seasonal works and return again. This is seasonal migration."

The mass outflow of Belarusians can indirectly be proved by statistics: the number of registered employees in January—September decreased by 81,900 to 3,374,000 people, which is 97.6% of last year's number for the same period.

According to the results of the 2009 population census, the working-age population in Belarus considerably exceeds the number of people at work – over 5.8 million people, or 62% of the country's population. Almost 2.5 million of working-age Belarusians are unemployed in Belarus's economy. The difference between the number of employed people and the number of people of working age was smaller in January 2012 – about 1.3 million.

Source: Charter97 Press Center, January 10, 2013

Belarus Has the Highest Inflation Rate Among Post-Soviet Nations in First 11 Months of 2012

Belarus had the highest inflation rate in the first 11 months of 2012 among the post-Soviet nations.

Consumer prices reportedly rose by 20.1 percent in Belarus in January-November against 6.3 percent in Tajikistan, six percent in Russia, 5.9 percent in Kyrgyzstan, 5.3 percent in Kazakhstan, 3.5 percent in Estonia and Moldova, 2.9 percent in Lithuania, 1.6 percent in Latvia, and 1.1 percent in Armenia.

Consumer prices fell by 0.4 percent in Ukraine, one percent in Azerbaijan and 1.1 percent in Georgia.

In Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, consumer prices reportedly increased by 3.3 and 1.1 percent, respectively, in the first nine months of the year.

In the self-proclaimed Republic of Transdniestria (Transnistria), Moldova, consumer prices rose by 9.5 percent in the first 11 months of 2012.

With an increase of 1.7 percent, Belarus had the highest rise in consumer prices in November compared with a 1.4-percent increase in Armenia, a one-percent increase in Azerbaijan, a 0.8-percent increase in Kyrgyzstan, a 0.7-percent increase in Kazakhstan, a 0.5-percent increase in Moldova, a 0.3-percent increase in Russia, a 0.2-percent increase in Tajikistan, and a 0.1-percent increase in Georgia. Consumer prices fell by 0.1 percent in Ukraine and Latvia, 0.2 percent in Lithuania, and 0.3 percent in Estonia.

Last year Belarus had an inflation rate of 108.7 percent, which was 12 to 54 times higher than in the other post-Soviet countries, whereas the government had projected an increase of 7.5 to 8.5 percent in consumer prices.

Consumer prices reportedly rose by 9.9 percent in Belarus in 2010, which was the third highest rise among the post-Soviet countries.

Source: http://naviny.by, 27 December 2012



SPORTS

Belarusian ice-hockey: Spectator in Sochi

By Kirył Kaścian

In short sport tournaments each single game is of essential importance. This was exactly what happened to the Belarus national ice-hockey team during the Olympic qualification tournament in the deeply provincial Danish town of Vojens. In the very first game of the tournament Belarus lost 2-4 to Slovenia. The subsequent victory of the ex-Yugoslav nation against Denmark 2-1 supplied Slovenians with tickets to Sochi 2014 as winners of the qualification tournament in the Group F regardless of results of the third-day match when Slovenia was to meet the outsiders from Ukraine. Thus, the closing game of the tournament between Belarus and Denmark has turned into a friendly match instead of being the final battle of favorites.

One may say that the Slovenian national team made a covenant with the Evil as the quite simplistic tactics as well as the overall skill level of Slovenian players have failed to impress. But they have been wholly compensated by the commitment, cohesion, effectiveness and great performance of the players during the tournament.

The Belarusian debacle raises only one question: what should be done next with the the Belarusian authorities' favorite sport? The fiasco in Vojens cannot be attributed to referees of the game against Slovenia who annulled the goal of Mikhaliou at the end of the second period when the score was still 2-2, nor can it be explained by the lack of the Belarusian ice-hockey players' desire to qualify to Sochi 2014. The reasons behind this debacle are of a rather systemic character.

It is widely known that Belarusian authorities pay enormous attention to the development of ice-hockey in the country. However, how effective is it? In the last two world championships the Belarusian national team finished 14 out of 16 contesting teams, right next to the descent boundary. Belarusian U-18 and U-20 national teams for a number of years have remained in the world championship's second tier, being unable to advance to the top level, i.e. to the top-10 of each age competition. The Belarusian domestic league, some five years ago quite strong and attractive for teams from neighboring Latvia and Ukraine, has turned into a secondary tournament for the sake of participation of Dynama Minsk in the Continental Hockey League (KHL), and three more clubs in two KHL-affiliated leagues. Such representative participation required relocation of resources and change of priorities from the domestic to the Russian-controlled sporting tournaments. Proponents of the accession to KHL argued that the participation of Dynama in this league would enable Belarusian players to play on top level, as well as that the Belarusian hockey in general would not lose the momentum by joining the Russian alternative of the NHL - doing the same as Latvians and Kazakhs. However, the major problem are personnel policies of Dynama – due to various reasons Koval, Uharau, Stasenka, Kaliuzhny and others don't play in Dynama but elsewhere in the KHL, while in Dynama itself the leading role belongs to foreign players. This practice is not uncommon, but the fact is that Dynama Minsk cannot be regarded as the base club of the Belarusian national ice-hockey team. As for the domestic league, its leaders are still competitive enough even when playing against KHL teams. However due to drainage of resources they cannot rely on drafting the best players. As a result, the difference between the league leaders and outsiders has grown which has been symbolically reflected by the new record score of the Belarusian hockey league when HK Homiel slammed their rivals from HK Viciebsk 16:1.

The ice-hockey remains the favorite sport of Belarusian authorities; this to a great extent protects the Belarusian hockey from the Ukrainian downfall scenario. The Belarusian national team still regularly plays on top level of ice-hockey championships but instead of the expected development, it faces stagnation. This implies that placements 9 to 14 in the world ice-hockey ranking now represents the reality for the Belarus national team while achieving placement in the world top-8, let alone wining world championship medals may become possible only as a result of incredible conjuncture.

Within the perspective of developing this sport the mass construction of ice hockey halls throughout Belarus might be regarded as a positive factor for expanding the basis of human resources of the Belarusian hockey, regardless of the political situation in the country. Another issue is that this potential is largely being wasted.

Thus, the primary objective of the Belarusian hockey should focus on training children and youth - in order to build a solid basis for the professional sport. For that reason it is important that young sportsmen are not only equipped and provided with relevant facilities, but also trained in a proper way. Therefore, when necessary, qualified foreign coaches should be invited to ice-hockey schools while regular follow-up professional development options should be provided by the Belarusian specialists. In a mid-term perspective, this would enable Belarusian U-18 and U-20 hockey teams

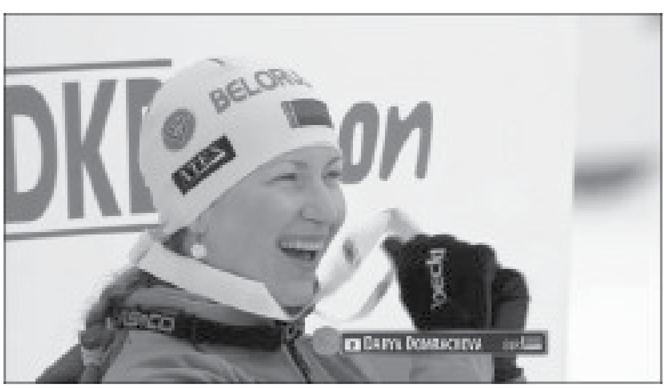
to achieve better results, at least by regularly playing in top-level world championships. As for the national ice-hockey team, having obtained such a solid basis, it is likely that they would be able to regularly appear in the top-8 world ranking and automatically qualify to the Olympics, avoiding debacles like the one in Vojens.

At the same time, ice hockey is not a cheap sport. Therefore, it is questionable whether the state facing economic crisis could afford to increase already solid subsidies to ice-hockey or whether private businesses would be willing to take part in it. However, relocation of the available financial resources towards childrens' and youth sport would trigger qualitative changes in Belarusian ice hockey, perhaps at the expense of immediate results. Granting Belarusian citizenship to talented foreign players which has become quite a common practice in Belarusian ice hockey may still be seen as an intermediate but not the ultimate solution since the effective development of the Belarusian ice hockey is achievable only in a mid-term perspective - provided a number of above described qualitative changes in the area of childrens' and youth sport are implemented.

Biathlon Star Domracheva Wins World Title

Darya Domracheva of Belarus ended the 2013 Biathlon World Championships on a high note, grabbing the gold in the women's mass start in Nove Mesto, Czech Republic. The 26-year-old star, who had not had a top 10 finish in the tournament before the final race, came first in 35 minutes, 54.4 seconds, 8.7 seconds ahead of Norway's Tora Berger. Another Belarusian, Nadzeya Skardzina, was 27th. Ms. Domracheva's gold became Belarus' only medal at the championships. This was Domracheva's second world title, adding to her pursuit title from last year's event in Ruhpolding.

Source: Radio Racyja, Febr. 18, 2013



NEWS BRIEFS

January 6, 2013
Belarus launches Tax Free system

The Tax Free system became operational in Belarus in 2013. This is envisaged in Law No.431-3 as of 26 October 2012 which introduced amendments and additions to the Tax Code of the Republic of Belarus. The law was officially published on the national legal Internet portal and takes effect on 1 January 2013, BelTA has learnt.

Belarus is the first among the countries of the Customs Union to launch the system of VAT refund to foreign citizens.

The refund will be made through an operator of the Special Tax Free system provided a foreign visitor buys goods worth at least Br800,000 (about €75) including VAT in one shop within one day. The goods must be purchased in the outlet which is part of the Tax Free system.

The VAT will not be returned if the merchandise is subject to zero VAT or a reduced-rate VAT (for instance, food). Excisable duties are not eligible for the VAT return scheme. The VAT return scheme will work like this: a foreigner shall produce a receipt at a border checkpoint while leaving the country. The VAT will be returned as cash if there is a bank office at the border checkpoint. If there is none, the money will be returned by a bank transfer.

The Tax Free system is widely used in western countries. The money spent by tourists in a country is usually bigger than the sum of uncollected VAT. The countries often compete with each other by reducing the minimum purchase sums that fall under tax refund rule. Tax Free is a measure of state support aimed at boosting trade, small business servicing inbound tourism. The Tax Free system has been implemented due to the rising number of international events held in Belarus and for the sake of promoting cultural, educational, and recreational tourism

Source: *BelTA*

January 9, 2013
Consumer prices reported up 21.8 percent in 2012

Consumer prices in Belarus increased by 21.8 percent in 2012, reported the National Statistical Committee (Belstat). According to Belstat, consumer prices rose by 1.9 percent in January, 1.5 percent in February, 1.5 percent in March, 1.7 percent in April, 1.6 percent in May, 1.8 percent in June, 1.3 percent in July, 2.3 percent in August, 1.3 percent in September, 1.8 percent in October, 1.7 percent in November and 1.4 percent in December. The highest increases occurred last year in the prices of health resort treatment services (89.6 percent), concert and theater tickets (72.1 percent), alcoholic drinks (62.3 percent), higher education (69 percent), movie tickets (54.6 percent), wheat flour (43.4 percent), bread and bakery products (42.2 percent), butter (31.1 percent), medicines (27.8 percent), potatoes (25.6 percent), stationery (25.1 percent), and gasoline (23.3 percent). The Belarusian government initially projected inflation to slow to 19 to 22 percent in 2012, but Alyaksandr Lukashenka suggested in February that the government should revise its inflation projection for the year downward to 13 to 15 percent.

Source: *BelaPAN*

January 16, 2013
Local border traffic regime more popular with Latvians than Belarusians

According to the statistics of the border unit, from January to October 2012, more than 8,100 Latvian citizens and around 100 Belarusians took advantage of the local border traffic regime. On average, every Latvian citizen crossed the border with Belarus nine times.

The local border traffic agreement between the governments of Belarus and Latvia entered into force on 1 February 2012. At the end of February, the Consulate of Latvia in Viciebsk issued the first permit for the local border movement. However, not all residents of the border areas can visit Latvia without visas, the source said. Simplified border crossing is permitted in strictly defined cases.

According to the agreement, the Belarusian border areas include Braslaŭ, Vierchniadzvinsk, Miory, Vidzy; on the Latvian side these are Aglona, Dagda, Daugavpils, Zilupe, Kraslava, Ludza, Rezekne and Ilukste municipalities.

Source: *BelTA*

February 20, 2013
Belarus border guard gets 2 years for teddy bear invasion

A Belarusian border guard who failed to sound the alarm during a Swedish teddy bear bombing has been sentenced to two years in prison, local media reported Tuesday.

Belarus Supreme Court said Monday that the guard has been convicted of failure to report the intrusion of a light plane that dropped hundreds of teddy bears bearing pro-democracy messages over Minsk, the capital.

After the accident Belarusian President Aliaksandr Lukashenka criticized military authorities for allowing the plane to enter Belarusian air space and carry out its "provocation."

According to Belarusian Foreign Ministry, the Swedish plane incident complicated Belarusian relations with Sweden and the European Union at large.

Source: *Xinhua*

February 23, 2013
Belarusian language activist gets five days in jail

A Belarusian activist has been jailed for five days after staging a demonstration aimed at protecting the Belarusian language.

Minsk-based sculptor Henik Lojka was arrested on February 22 after he unfolded a sign saying, "Congratulations on International Mother Language Day! Lyceum No. 4 was the last Belarusian language school".

Policemen were watching his actions. The education is being Russified, Henik Lojka told journalists. He noted that that statute of the Belarusian language Lyceum had been changed last year - they allowed teaching in Russian. Lojka finished his picket and went away a bit later. Then the sculptor managed to inform about his detention on the phone, Radio Liberty reports.

Lojka was charged with holding an unapproved public protest and sentenced the same day. The judge rejected Lojka's demand to hold the hearing in Belarusian, and the trial proceeded in Russian.

Source: *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*

March 15, 2013
Museum of Belarusian Jews to be set up in Bychaŭ

The work to set up a museum of Belarusian Jews will be started in Bychaŭ in 2013, BelTA learnt from Culture Minister of Belarus Barys Sviatloŭ.

The museum will be housed in a synagogue located on the territory of Bychaŭ Castle. "This year we will start working on the establishment of the museum. We will lay a foundation and do the necessary paperwork," the Culture Minister said.

At present Bychaŭ Castle amounts to several pieces of fortifications of a former fortress. The compound includes a synagogue and a former Catholic church. There are plans to restore the towers of the castle, do the conservation of its fragments, and landscaping works on the adjacent territory. Br900 million will be allocated for the project from the central budget, Br5 billion from the regional budget and Br1 billion from the local budget.

The Belarusian Written Language Day is held in towns that shaped Belarusian culture, science, literature and book publishing. Polack was the first town to host the celebrations. It was followed by Navahradak, Turaŭ, Niasviž, Orša, Pinsk, Mscislaŭ, Mir, Kamianiec, Pastavy, Zaslaŭje, Chojniki, Hancavičy and Hlybokaje. This year the Belarusian Written Language Day will be held in Bychaŭ, Mahilioŭ Voblasć.

Source: *BelTA*

March 19, 2013
UN report rates Belarus among countries with high human development index

Belarus is among countries with a high level of human development, according the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)'s Human Development Index report that was released last week, BelaPAN said.

According to the UN press office, the report contains data on living standards, social protection, health, education, cultural development, crime rate, environmental protection and participation of people in decision-making processes.

Norway, Australia, the United States, the Netherlands and Germany top the list of countries with a very high human development index.

Belarus was rated by the UN 50th in the world on the Human Development Index. It had the fourth highest spot among the 15 post-Soviet countries, trailing only Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia.

The UNDP publishes its report every year since 1990. The report is drawn up by a group of independent experts and is based on various analytical data and international statistics.

Source: *BelaPAN*

March 28, 2013
Soccer fans complain to national federation about police

Fans of FC Dynama Brest have complained to the Belarusian Football Federation (BFF) about the actions of riot police who prohibited them from displaying a Belarusian-language banner and wearing T-shirts with Belarusian-language slogans during a Belarusian Cup game in Minsk earlier this month.

According to the fans, they were subjected to "humiliating" searches at the entrance to the stands and the police seized their banner that said, "[Support] Dynama Brest from the cradle to the grave, with the name that no one will take away." In addition, some of the fans were ordered to take off their T-shirts bearing messages saying, "We are not drunk bulbashs [a derogatory

term for Belarusians]! We are strong Belarusians!" and "Dynama Brest is my pride, my life, everything that I love and am proud of."

The supporters accused police officers of treating soccer fans with bias and stressed that the incident was fresh evidence of the need to have BFF-trained stewards take over the function of providing security during soccer games from the police.

Source: *BelaPAN*

March 28, 2013

Minsk-Vilnius journey to become 30 minutes faster on 26 May

The journey time by train No.15/16 and No. 37/38 will reduce by half and hour and make 2.5 hours starting from 26 May, BelTA learnt from the press service of Belarusian Railways.

Specialists noted that this will be achieved thanks to optimization of border and customs control.

The details and terms of the Belarus-Lithuania joint project to reduce the Minsk-Vilnius journey time have been recently discussed at a session in Minsk. Taking part in it were representatives of Belarusian Railways, Lithuanian Railways, border and customs services of Belarus and Lithuania. The sides formalized a decision on optimizing border and customs control on trains No.15/16 and No. 37/38. Passenger screening on the Belarusian territory will be done on the route between Maladziečna and Hudahaj. In Lithuania the checks will be carried out at a special terminal at the Vilnius railways station.

The reduction of travel time between Minsk and Vilnius down to 2.5 hours is the second stage of the project to reduce journey time between the capitals of Belarus and Lithuania. The first phase was completed in 2011. As a result the travel time between the capital cities of Belarus and Lithuania reduced from 4 hours to 3 hours.

The press service of Belarusian Railways informed that the passenger flow between the two countries exceeded 295,000 people in 2012, up by 51.7% against 2011. About 195,000 people travelled by train No. 15/16 in 2012, or 66.7% of all travelers going from Minsk to Vilnius and back. This means that this train is most popular with travelers.

Source: *BelTA*

March 29, 2013

Belarus, Turkey sign visa abolition, readmission agreements

The Belarusian-Turkish agreements on visa abolition and readmission were signed in Minsk on 29 March. The intergovernmental agreement on visa-free trips was signed by Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Belarus and Turkey Uladzimir Makei and Ahmet Davutoglu. Signatures on the intergovernmental agreement on readmission were put by Interior Minister of Belarus Ihar Shunevich and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey. Uladzimir Makei noted that the development and signing of the two agreements were initiated after the visit of the President of Belarus to Turkey in October 2010. "These are two important agreements that will benefit the people of the two countries," the Foreign Minister of Belarus said. According to Makei, the agreement on visa-free trips will allow the citizens of the two countries visiting Belarus and Turkey without the need to undergo any visa procurement procedures for up to 90 days a year or up to 30 days in one trip.

Source: *BelTA*

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